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MONITORY LETTERS

TO

CHURCH MEMBERS.

1871

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PREFACE.

A LOW state of religion, in any community, is indicated especially by the delinquencies of professed Christians. These delinquencies take on a variety of forms, according to the temperament of the individual, and the peculiar circumstances in which he is placed. Sometimes, no doubt, they result more immediately from the want of due reflection, or of a cultivated moral discernment; while yet, perhaps still more frequently, they originate in the concurrence of powerful temptation with an ill kept heart and a bribed or stifled conscience. In order to elevate the tone of Christian feeling and action, it is necessary not only that Christians should be exhorted in general to avoid that which is evil, and cleave to that which is good, but that the various forms of evil which they are to avoid, and of good which they are to practise, with corresponding motives, both dissuasive and persuasive, should be distinctly placed before them. However suitable it is that the principles of Christian duty should be often urged in their comprehensive import, it is quite certain that there are many consciences by which they will never be applied, unless they are presented in the minute details of daily experience.

It is under the influence of this conviction that these Letters have been written. That most of the particular evils at which they aim exist, in a greater or less degree, in every Christian community, the author cannot doubt; and it seems to him equally certain that just in proportion as they prevail, they not only mar the evidence and depress the standard of Christian character, but oppose a powerful obstacle to the general success of the preaching of the Gospel. He does not ask any reader to receive implicitly any opinion expressed in this book; but he does ask that, before he rejects any of its teachings, he will carefully refer them to the only unerring standard, as well as open his ear to the still small voice of the monitor within.

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MONITORY LETTERS.

LETTER I.

TO ONE WHO UNDERVALUES DIVINE TRUTH.

In a conversation that I lately had with you, you made certain statements in regard to some of the great truths of the Gospel, and I may say in regard to Christian truth in general, that have given me, on reflection, no little anxiety. You did not explicitly deny any important doctrine, but you seemed to have difficulties in respect to several; and what occasioned me still greater concern was, that you appeared to think it a matter of small moment whether a person should believe one doctrine or system of doctrine, or another, provided he has a general belief in Christianity, and is blameless in his external deportment. I beg to call your attention to a few thoughts which the conversation to which I refer has suggested to me. I will not now dwell on the consideration that this unsettled state of mind is utterly inconsistent with the relation you bear

to the Church—the consent which you have, at least virtually, given to an evangelical creed; but will endeavour to show you, on other grounds, that it is utterly unworthy of your character as a professed disciple of Christ.

My first remark is, that a belief in the distinctive doctrines of Christianity is essential to all evangelical experience and evangelical practice. What we call Christian experience, has to do more immediately with the feelings, the affections, the heart. But the influence which is brought to bear upon this part of our nature, is the influence of truth received first by the intellect—of the very truths which the Gospel reveals, and no other; and if these truths are not received, it is impossible that there should exist any experience that corresponds to them. Each of these truths in particular, as well as the general system of which each is a part, is adapted to produce a certain effect—to bring into exercise certain classes of the moral feelings; and if something else be substituted for this, no matter though it be called by the same name, the effect produced will correspond with the doctrine that is actually received, and not with that for which it is substituted; in other words, it will not be evangelical experience. As to practice, or the outward demonstration of the inward feeling, it may not always be easy to distinguish that which is evangelical from that

which is not so; because other motives than those that are in the highest sense Christian, may operate to produce an exterior, in many respects, such as Christianity requires; and yet, if the act be viewed in connection with the state of the heart in which it originates, it cannot be said to bear an evangelical character, any further than it is prompted by evangelical motives. Is it not manifest, then, that there is just as much importance to be attached to a firm belief of the great doctrines of the Gospel, as there is to a genuine Christian experience, or to a truly religious life?

I did not understand you to say that you felt prepared to renounce any of what are commonly considered the leading truths of Christianity; but you seemed to think that there might be so much doubt in respect to some of them, as to justify considerable latitude of opinion, and call for the exercise of an enlarged charity. Allow me to say, that this supposes a state of mind that must give to your own Christian experience, at least, an equivocal character. I would fain hope that it may be only a shock which your religious convictions have received, and from which they will quickly recover; but so long as you continue of the same mind as you now are, undervaluing God's truth, and doubting whether he has revealed one thing or another, your experience, to say the least, cannot be of a settled and decided

character. You have too much reason to fear, and you give others too much reason to fear, that you have come into the visible Church a stranger to renewing grace.

Admitting even that the state into which you have fallen is consistent with the existence of a principle of grace in your heart, yet it must, at least, prove greatly adverse to your Christian enjoyment. A state of uncertainty in respect to any question in which we are deeply interested, is always a painful state. What, then, must it be to be in doubt in regard to those great doctrines which have respect to the soul's eternal salvation —doctrines in which are bound up alike both our duty and our destiny? Can you, for instance, have the shadow of doubt whether Jesus Christ has made an atonement for sin, or whether our salvation depends on faith in his atonement, without being thrown into a state of the deepest perplexity and distress? If you *can* feel such doubts, unaccompanied with deep anxiety, you need no better evidence that you have built on a foundation that will be swept away.

You tell me that there has always been a variety of opinions in respect to the meaning of Scripture, and that men of equally pure morality have held views directly opposite to each other; that it were intolerable arrogance in any one sect to profess to have discovered the whole truth,

and that the Bible really does seem to speak a different language, on the same subject, in different places. But I take for granted you do not doubt that the Bible really contains a divine revelation. Is it, then, I ask, consistent with the wisdom and goodness of God, that he should have spoken to men on a subject that involves their highest interests, and yet should have spoken so obscurely that, in the due application of their faculties, they cannot understand his communications? Can that justly be considered a revelation, which is not so clear as to leave men without excuse for rejecting it? But you ask, Why, then, this variety of opinion? The true answer is, that men naturally "love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil." But you tell me that many of those persons, of whose creed I should judge most unfavourably, are distinguished for kindness and urbanity—for everything that is amiable, and graceful, and of good report in private and social life. I answer, all this may be nothing more than nature highly cultivated; there may be concealed beneath that beautiful exterior, a heart unreconciled to God—a heart that has no relish for divine truth, and has never known so much as one holy pulsation. Admitting, then, that the divine revelation is perfectly clear, and full, and consistent, there is no difficulty in accounting for the fact that men of different char-

acters view it with different eyes; but the alleged obscurity and inconsistency of the record, it is impossible to account for, without rejecting it altogether, or arraigning the character of God on the charge of having trifled with his creatures.

You say that if a man possesses a general belief in Christianity, *that* is enough, and though his creed may be one thing or another, he is to be accounted a Christian, especially if there is nothing in his life that is inconsistent with his profession. But does not this idea annihilate the importance of Christian faith altogether? Christianity is a great moral system, designed to produce great moral effects. But tell me what great effects can be expected to flow from a belief of the proposition, that the Bible contains a revelation from God, independently of a belief of the particular truths which this revelation embraces. A man may believe in the divine authority of the Scriptures, and yet if he does not know what they contain, or if, by perversion, he gathers from them some system of error, his belief in their divinity becomes a matter of no significance. He may, indeed, call himself a Christian, but he assumes a name that does not really belong to him.

Allow me to say that, even on the most favourable supposition in respect to your present state of mind—that is, admitting that it is only a tem-

porary religious aberration, and not a confirmed habit of the soul—it places you in circumstances of peculiar jeopardy. Be it so that you have not yet made shipwreck of the faith—have not yet become fixed in any fundamental error—yet you can have no security against it; for if you have reached the point of believing that any form of error is harmless, you have taken one step in the downward course; and even though you may pause for the present, yet you are standing on a declivity, where the descent is easy, and will be likely to be rapid and fatal. I say again, you have no security against any error—you are at the mercy of every wind of false doctrine that may overtake you. If you will be secure from error, you must value the truth; and if you will value it, you must understand it.

Let me, then, earnestly entreat you to betake yourself at once to the diligent study of God's word. Settle it in your mind that there is something revealed there that is definite; and that, however there may be real difficulties in respect to some points of minor importance, yet in regard to all the essentials of Christianity, there is nothing that is not perfectly clear to a truly docile spirit. Take up the doctrines of the Gospel, and examine them one by one; and then observe how harmoniously they arrange themselves into a great system of truth, and see how the whole is

illumined by the glory of God as it shines in the face of Jesus Christ. If you have any doubts in respect to any particular doctrine, let it be your first concern to get rid of them; but take care that you stop where the revelation stops, and that you never perplex yourself by an attempt to be wise above what is written. I pray you, from a regard to your Christian consistency, and comfort, and usefulness, to ponder these few hints, and I pray God that you may henceforward be fully established in the faith of the Gospel.

LETTER II.

TO ONE WHO ATTENDS CHURCH BUT HALF A DAY.

You will not, I hope, think me obtrusive in addressing you on a subject that has, for some time past, weighed heavily upon my mind, as well as upon the minds of some other of your Christian friends. I remember the time when you were a regular attendant, not only on the services of the Sabbath both parts of the day, but on all the religious exercises of the week, in the Church of which you are a member. You used sometimes to take the lead in our social devotions, and we were always glad to hear your voice; for it quickened and edified us. Indeed, so constant was your attendance on religious services, both in season and out of season, that your absence always led to the inquiry, what had detained you. But it is not with you now as it was in other days. You have not only forsaken the weekly lecture, the prayer-meeting, and every occasional religious exercise, but, alas! you have become a half-day worshipper in the house of God; and it is impossible that any of your Christian friends should view such a change with indifference. They re-

spect and esteem you, and are not slow to acknowledge your many estimable qualities, but they are distressed that you should have fallen into a habit which seems to them so utterly inconsistent with your Christian obligations.

I would affectionately urge you to abandon this habit; first of all, from a regard to your own Christian edification and comfort. It cannot be that two discourses of ordinary length on the Sabbath are more than you are able, in the legitimate exercise of your faculties, to digest and apply. You certainly need to have as much truth as would ordinarily be thus communicated, deposited in your mind, as material for your intellectual and moral faculties to work upon, until another Sabbath comes round. I have never heard that you have complained of the preaching under which you sit; but if you should apologize to your conscience for your absence in the afternoon, on the ground that you find less edification than you could desire, the answer is that you are living in the midst of evangelical Churches, and that you can choose such ministrations as are most agreeable to you. Possibly your plea may be that you can get more good by spending the hour of the afternoon service in thinking over and applying the morning sermon, than in hearing another. In order to test the sincerity of this plea, I would advise you to notice whether the afternoon is re-

ally spent in endeavouring to give permanence to the impressions received in the morning, or whether it is not rather given to a listless and indolent habit of mind, not to say to idle conversation, or even unprofitable reading.

But you owe a duty on this subject to the Church with which you are connected. You have covenanted to walk with them in the bonds of Christian fellowship. In accordance with ancient and unbroken usage, especially in all large towns, your Church sustains two services on the Sabbath; and she expects all her members to be present at both of them; and such is the acknowledged standard of Christian duty on this subject, that no one can be habitually absent, but that both the Church and the world mark the delinquency. In turning your back on the afternoon service, therefore, you wound the hearts of your fellow Christians. They feel that in one respect, at least, you are not a fellow-helper with them unto the kingdom of God; that you are not what they had a right to expect you would be, when they welcomed you to the joys and benefits of Christian communion. They feel that your example, in seeming to set lightly by the ordinances of God's house, neutralizes, in a degree, their own efforts for the advancement of his cause.

Do you not owe something to your minister, also? I do not believe you would intentionally

wound his feelings; and yet, pardon me for telling you that I know you have done so—that you do so continually. He cherishes towards you nothing but respect and good will; he even tries to apologize, in every way that he can, for the course into which you have fallen; but he has acknowledged to some of his particular friends, that whenever he casts his eye at your seat in the afternoon, and sees that you are not there, it sends a chill to his inmost heart. It is a natural construction enough of your conduct, that his preaching does not edify you, and therefore you are willing to hear as little of it as may consist with decency. And then he feels that your example is greatly lessening the power of his ministry, both in the Church and out of it; and I doubt not that, if you knew all, you would know that what you do, without, perhaps, being aware that he even notices it, causes him sometimes to weep in secret places.

May I not say a word here, also, in behalf of your own family? They, I perceive, continue to come in the afternoon, though you stay away. I take for granted that you approve of their course, notwithstanding your example would seem to encourage an opposite one. Suppose they, too, should prefer to attend only one service, and there should not be a single representative of your family in the Church in the afternoon—would you

be satisfied with such a state of things? or, if it should exist, could you consistently say anything against it? Have you not reason to fear that your children may grow up placing a low estimate on divine institutions, and point to your example as their justification? Nay, have you not reason to fear that they will so far improve upon the example you set them, that instead of being even half-day hearers of God's word, they will turn their backs on the services of his house altogether?

May I not say a word, too, in behalf of the careless and ungodly—of those who have no relish for the worship of God, and who are glad to find apologies for the neglect of it? "There," says one, "is a professor of religion, and yet half a day in the Church is quite enough for *him;* and even *that*, I doubt not, he would rather spend elsewhere, if he were not constrained by a regard to his profession." "There," says another, "is a man who seems to say, by his presence at the communion table, that there is something in religion, but he says quite as plainly, by his irregular attendance at Church, that it is doubtful whether there is anything in it or not." And thus the neglecter of Christian ordinances, even the despiser of the Gospel of Christ, is strengthened in irreligion by the example of one of Christ's own professed disciples.

You would not, I take for granted, seriously recommend the discontinuance of the afternoon service. You would not be satisfied if your minister should tell the people that one service is enough, and that it were better that he should spend the hour allotted to the second service in some other way than in preaching to them. Or if you should hear that the congregation, in the afternoon, had dwindled down to a mere handful, so that it had become a question whether it should be attempted any longer to sustain a public service, you could not but feel that such a state of things was indicative of the prevalence of extreme worldliness, and was a just occasion for the Church to put on garments of mourning. But do you not see that this is just what you are doing your utmost to produce; and that if all were to walk in your steps, there would be no preaching in the afternoon, because there would be nobody to preach to?

May I not hope that your seat in the Church, during the second service, will not hereafter be vacant? I assure you that I am only one of a large number who would hail such a change with devout thankfulness. Believe me, your consistency, your happiness, your usefulness, would all be promoted by it.

LETTER III.

TO A LADY WHO SENDS HER CHILDREN TO THE DANCING-SCHOOL.

As I have a right to suppose that you intend to be governed, in all your conduct, by honest convictions of duty, I take for granted, that in giving your children the opportunity to learn to dance, you do not act without mature reflection. I feel constrained to say that my judgment in reference to this matter differs entirely from yours; and I am sure you will not blame me, if I state to you candidly my reasons for believing, as I do, that you have fallen into a serious practical error.

I wish, however, to speak on the subject with due discrimination. I do not mean to intimate, that in the mere act of dancing there is anything necessarily wrong. Dancing, considered as a mere exercise, and apart from the circumstances which usually attend it, could not reasonably be objected to. And I can suppose circumstances in which, even as an amusement, there might be comparatively little to be said against it. Nevertheless I cannot view it, as it actually exists, or as it is likely to exist, as other than a serious

evil; and I cannot but think, if you will give due weight to the considerations which I am about to adduce, that you too will so regard it.

The great argument that is generally urged, and that I suppose has prevailed with yourself, in favour of sending children to the dancing-school, is that it gives them easy and graceful manners. My answer to this is, that if your children are accustomed to refined society, they do not need any such auxiliary. Their manners, unless they happen to be constituted with the most invincible tendencies to awkwardness, will become graceful, of course. If they are not accustomed to refined society, the efforts of the dancing-master will accomplish nothing more than to make them miserably affected. I remember to have heard President Dwight once say, that "manners acquired at a dancing-school, were apt to be like something tied on with a tow string." When I was at home, during one college vacation, I found that a new dispensation of refinement had opened upon my native village in the establishment of a dancing-school. A new set of rules had been given for entering a room, for taking off the hat, and divers other small matters entering into the economy of social intercourse. I was unfortunate enough to see the new rules reduced to practice first at the Church door; and such was the flourish with which the uncovering

of the head was accompanied, that instead of being grave enough to enter the Church, I could hardly keep decent enough to stay outside. The secret of it was, that a number of the lads who had been brought up in the plainest way, were then in a course of training under a dancing-master, to become gentlemen; and each one acted as if he thought that the graces had all settled *en masse* upon his own person. For myself, I had much rather see rusticity united with simplicity than with affectation.

Allow me to say that you can yourself do more to make the manners of your children what they ought to be, than all the teachers of dancing in the world. Endeavour to encourage in them benevolent dispositions, and check all tendency to rudeness and impropriety of conduct, and teach them that there is nothing so beautiful in manners as the simplicity of nature, and you will have little occasion to invoke any foreign aid.

My great objection to sending children to a dancing school, is that I am persuaded it puts in serious jeopardy their immortal interests. As an amusement, it soon becomes exceedingly attractive, and even absorbing. Children will neglect their lessons in everything else, but the lesson in dancing nothing must interfere with. The young lady will dance all night, though she sleeps the whole of the day before as a preparation, and

the whole of the day after as a consequence. And then, too, she is hereby brought into a scene of unrestrained levity, not to say of boisterous mirth; and if a word were to be spoken that had even the remotest bearing upon a serious subject, it would be felt to be sadly out of place. There is, on these occasions, everything to stimulate and exhaust the animal nature; and, I may add, not unfrequently much to blunt the natural sense of delicacy, without which female character is never really attractive. I think I may appeal to all experience to justify me, when I say that the direct tendency of mingling in such scenes is to cherish spiritual insensibility, and to render religion every way more distasteful. Quite in harmony with this remark is the fact, that whenever a young person, who has been accustomed to attend balls and dancing parties, is brought to serious consideration, *that* is uniformly the signal for giving up all such amusements.

You will say, perhaps, that you agree with me in this, and that you are no more an advocate of large dancing assemblies than I am; but you do not consider it at all a necessary or even probable consequence of your children learning to dance, that they should ever be found in any such adverse circumstances. But permit me to ask, Why not? If they understand the art of dancing, and have acquired, as they naturally will in learning

it, a strong relish for it, it is idle to suppose that they will never practise it except within such bounds as your judgment may prescribe. If they have grown up devoted to this amusement, doubtless they have grown up in a state of indifference to religion; and what else can you expect but that their views in regard to the extent to which the amusement may be indulged, will be much more liberal than your own? And by and by, in all probability, their importunity will prevail over your scruples, or else they will claim that they are old enough to judge and act for themselves. They have reached a point now, where you cannot disguise it to yourself that they are doing wrong, and that there is great danger that they will always be "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God." Have you no painful sense of responsibility in the case? Would it not have been better that you should have never led them into this temptation? If you were to see a beloved child lying on her death-bed, without any of the consolations of religion, reviewing a life of folly, and anticipating an eternity of misery, would there be anything to alleviate your anguish in the reflection that you had not refused her the advantages of the dancing-school?

I cannot but think that the course which you are taking is fitted to depress the standard of Christian character, and to hinder the progress

of true religion. Your children are given to you to educate for the Lord; and you have recognized this obligation in dedicating them to him in baptism. But can you really feel that you are discharging this obligation in having them taught to dance? Do you even expect that their thoughts will be directed seriously to the subject of religion while they are thus being trained? Nay, if this should really be the case, would you not expect them to exchange the dancing-school for the prayer-meeting? Would you give credit to any pretensions of seriousness which they might make, so long as they retained their accustomed interest in this amusement? But it is not merely that you oppose an obstacle to *their* becoming religious—your example has a much wider influence; it helps to confound the Church and the world, and *that* not by bringing the world up, but by bringing the Church down. If professedly Christian parents will educate their children upon mere worldly maxims, and with a view chiefly to enable them to shine in worldly circles, can we wonder that the world should look on and say, with a measure of triumph, "What do ye more than others?"

I must not omit to say that you do not duly consider your obligations to those with whom you have covenanted to walk in the Gospel. Doubtless there are those among them who see no evil in what you are doing; who, on the contrary, tes-

tify their approbation of it by doing the same themselves. But I put it to your conscience whether these are among the more spiritually minded members of the Church; whether, on the other hand, they are not among those whom you would fear most to see on a death-bed; and whether, finally, you have not reason to believe that your example in this very matter strengthens them in their worldliness. But it is not thus with all your fellow-professors. There are among them not a few who believe your course to be fraught with serious evil, and who feel well nigh paralyzed by its influence in their efforts to break up the reigning spiritual lethargy around you. Your minister, too, I know, sympathizes in their anxiety. He feels that you are opposing an obstacle to the success of his labours. If he has never spoken to you on the subject, I am sure it is not because the subject has not rested heavily upon his spirit.

I will venture, finally, to say that you are not taking the course which will secure the highest happiness to yourself. You must, at no distant period, either die and leave your children, or they must die and leave you. In either case do you believe that you are consulting your own highest enjoyment? What gratification would you feel, as you were closing your eyes upon a beloved daughter, to reflect that she was first in this ele-

gant accomplishment, though she had not even begun to think of an hereafter? Or if the case should be different, and she should go before you to mingle in the scenes beyond the veil, would the remembrance of her dancing-school days—days in which she was trained to nothing but vanity—make it easy for you to bend over her coffin?

LETTER IV.

TO ONE WHO NEGLECTS FAMILY PRAYER.

It has lately come to my knowledge that God is not acknowledged in your household. I hear that the whole day, the whole week, the whole year passes, and the voice of prayer and thanksgiving is never once heard in your dwelling, unless, indeed, some stranger is present, whom, for decency's sake, you ask to perform this service. I am deeply affected by this piece of intelligence concerning you. The least that I can do is to hold up to you your duty, and urge you to the discharge of it.

Let me say, then, in the first place, that this duty is required of you by your own consistency, influence, and comfort, as the Christian head of a family.

You have not only professedly given yourself away to God in an everlasting covenant, but virtually promised, in dependence on divine grace, to endeavour to do every duty which God requires of you; to take up every cross which you may find in your path. Now I venture to say, if you take counsel either of God's word, or of the voice

that cometh up from the depths of your own spirit, you do not doubt, you cannot doubt, that you are bound to the duty of family prayer ; and if you neglect it you cannot but feel that you are chargeable with inconsistency. Your Christian obligations, I am sure, must hang as a heavy burden upon you, while you are obliged to reflect that there is at least one of them that you deliberately and habitually fail to discharge.

Nor is the discharge of this duty less essential to your *influence*, as the head of a family, than to your consistency. The very fact that a palpable inconsistency exists between your conduct and your obligations, must itself greatly lessen your Christian influence ; while, on the other hand, the faithful discharge of this duty would tend greatly to increase it. Never does the head of a family appear so venerable in the eyes of his household, as when he is bowing the knee in the midst of them, and acting in their behalf as a priest of the Most High God. This, more than almost anything else, imparts dignity and sacredness to the parental relation, while it gives an air of authority to every other Christian duty which the parent performs.

And your *comfort* is no less concerned than your consistency and influence. For how can you be happy when you are obliged to feel that there is one duty, and that a highly important

one, urging itself upon you, which you habitually neglect? How can you be happy in the reflection that there is no altar consecrated to God in your dwelling, and that the Author of all your blessings is never socially acknowledged there? How can you be happy in the consciousness that your neglect of duty may intercept the kindly influences of God's grace in relation to those who are most dear to you? I know you cannot be happy—you cannot even be at ease, unless you are sunk in spiritual lethargy.

Can you doubt that the best interests of your family require this service at your hands? You do not question the general importance or efficacy of prayer. And in what circumstances, I ask, can prayer be offered, where it is more fitting, or where more considerations combine to render it an impressive and deeply interesting service, than in the family? Those who engage in it are united by the tenderest ties of life; they have common blessings to supplicate; and their mutual affection throws into their petitions an unwonted tenderness and fervour. And hence there are no prayers that are more likely to be effectual than those which go up from the domestic altar. And if there is a connection between asking and receiving, insomuch that they who ask not cannot expect to receive, then how important is it that prayer should be daily offered up in every family!

If the blessings of renewing grace descend upon other families, and not upon yours—if the children of other parents are awakened and brought to repentance, while yours are still walking in the way to death, how know you but it may be because you have never, as the head of your household, asked for these blessings? Is it any wonder that a prayerless family should be, in this most important particular, an unblest family?

And if the performance of this duty is fitted to promote domestic piety, not less does it minister to domestic order and subordination. To say nothing of the fact that this is one of the blessings proper to be supplicated at the domestic altar, the very exercise itself, when performed with due solemnity and decorum, has a benign influence on the general order of the family. Those who meet together thus statedly for prayer, will hardly find it in their hearts to engage in domestic strife, or to resist or evade parental authority. Their hearts will naturally be bound together more closely; and they will feel their obligation to be fellow-helpers for the peace and harmony and general welfare of the family circle.

And this leads me to remark that the *happiness* of a family is greatly promoted by the faithful discharge of this duty. Is not that a happy family in which religion prevails, controlling alike the actions of the head and the members, and

diffusing a grateful influence over every relation? Is not that a happy family where the spirit of due subordination is manifested; and each individual belonging to it knows and keeps his proper place; and each one strives for the comfort and benefit of all the rest? Is not that a happy family which keeps up a daily intercourse with the Author of all blessing, and most or all of whose members are permitted to recognize each other as joint heirs to the heavenly inheritance? But you surely cannot doubt that family prayer is favourable to each of these objects. If they are not always completely attained, where this duty is observed, I may safely say that they are never attained where it is neglected.

The best interests of the Church also demand of you the observance of this duty. This follows from the statements already made; for the family is the nursery for the Church; and if family religion declines, the interests of the Church languish, of course; and family religion *must* decline, where family prayer is neglected. How is it in point of fact? Are not far the greater number of those who, from time to time, are gathered into the fold of Christ, from those families in which God is acknowledged morning and evening? And if you are a Christian, as you profess to be, is not the welfare of the Church most dear to you? Are you not accustomed to pray in your

closet and in the sanctuary, that God will build up Zion, and make her a name and a praise in the earth? But how can you offer such a petition, if you do nothing in your family to accomplish the object of it; especially if you neglect family devotion, than which nothing can be more essential to its accomplishment?

Moreover, civil society also has *its* claims upon you. Need I say that it is religion that blesses, and vice that curses and scourges the world? Religion purifies the fountains of social life. Religion wears off the rough points in the human character. Religion enjoins the great duties of justice and truth and charity. Religion is the soul of patriotism, the nurse of philanthropy, the seed of all public virtue. But we cannot expect religion to prosper in the State, where it does not prosper in the family, and we cannot look for the prevalence of domestic religion, without a corresponding prevalence of domestic devotion. I say, then, they who worship God in their families, thereby render an efficient service to their country; for not only are they supplicating directly a blessing on their country, but they are lending an influence in favor of domestic religion; and religion diffused through all the families of the land, would make us a religious nation. If our country ever becomes all that we could desire, it will be in consequence of the revival of family

religion; and the time, I doubt not, will come, when the man who leads his family daily to the throne of mercy, will be recognized and reverenced as a true patriot, while the blustering demagogue will have his reward meted out to him in the reprobation of a virtuous community.

If then there are so many interests involved in the maintenance of domestic worship; if it is a duty that you owe to yourself, to your family, to the Church, and to civil society; what further considerations need I urge to induce you seriously and resolutely to engage in it? In another letter, I shall examine various excuses, some of which, I suppose, you may be pleading at the bar of your own conscience, for the neglect of this duty.

LETTER V.

TO ONE WHO NEGLECTS FAMILY PRAYER.

In a preceding letter I have endeavoured to illustrate your obligation to acknowledge God in your house, in the morning and evening sacrifice. As you live habitually in the neglect of this, I suppose you have some excuse for your conduct with which you at least try to be satisfied. I do not know what it is; but I propose to examine several that are most commonly urged, in the hope that I may include that on which you chiefly depend.

There are those, then, who say that there is no divine warrant for family prayer—nothing in the Bible that requires of them such a service; and so long as we cannot urge divine authority in the matter, it is in vain to attempt to urge any other.

Suppose it be admitted that this duty is not required in the Scriptures *in form*, as distinct from religious worship on all other occasions, yet will any considerate person say that this is to be taken for evidence that it is not required at all? Then is there no scriptural warrant for bringing our children to be dedicated to God in baptism;

none for observing the first day of the week as the Sabbath; none for admitting females to the Lord's table. If you do not doubt the obligation to these latter duties, on the ground that they are not *expressly* required in God's word, no more can you doubt, on the same ground, your obligation to the former.

It is worthy of remark, that prayer, in the most general sense, is nowhere enjoined in the Scriptures as a duty which was before unknown, or as the subject of a new institution; and that the first injunction of this duty, the terms of which regard it as in any sense generally obligatory, was given when the world was about three thousand years old, and the Jewish church about eight hundred. It is hence fairly inferable that the Scriptures did not intend to institute this duty anew in any passage whatever. They treated the duty as one which had been acknowledged from the beginning; and all that they had to do was to give directions in respect to the time, manner, and spirit of its performance. The circumstances in which the subject is taken up, and the manner in which it is treated, would lead us to expect what we actually find—general directions concerning the duty of prayer, rather than specific directions concerning any particular form of it.

But let us see whether there is not enough in

the Bible to constitute a scriptural warrant to this duty. Let us see whether there are not examples which have the force of commands, and commands which are too explicit to justify doubt.

What, then, are some of the most striking examples of domestic worship, which have been transmitted to us in the Scriptures with the mark of God's approbation?

Abraham is an example. Wherever he sojourned, he built an altar to the Lord, and called upon his name; and God expressed his approbation of his character as the head of a family in these memorable words—"I know him, that he will command his children and household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him." *Joshua* is an example. Having exhorted the people of Israel to put away their strange gods, meaning the gods of Abraham's idolatrous ancestors, and serve Jehovah, he says—"If it seem evil to you to serve the Lord, choose ye this day whom ye will serve; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." But in what way could Joshua resolve for his family as well as himself, that they should serve the Lord, except as he maintained stated forms of social worship in his house, at which he required that they should be present? *Job* was an example. When his chil-

dren, according to the custom of the day, were holding a natal feast, "he sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered sacrifice according to the number of them all." And it is added, "Thus did Job continually." You will say, perhaps, that Job's children had become the heads of separate families, and were scattered about in the neighbourhood, so that this was at best only an example of occasional domestic worship. But you are to recollect that, in those early times, the father officiated as a priest among his children; and if Job, after his children had left him and were settled in their own habitations, still availed himself of every opportunity to gather them around the domestic altar, it surely cannot be doubted that he required them statedly to engage in this exercise, while they were yet the inmates of his own dwelling. *David* is an example. It is expressly said of him, that after all the people had departed, every man to his house, "he returned to bless his household." *Cornelius*, the centurion, was an example; for the apostle says of him that he "was a devout man, and one who feared God with all his house; and prayed to God alway;" or daily, at the stated hours of prayer, which were morning and evening. And in the apostolic times, we find frequent mention made of Churches in particular houses. We meet with frequent salutations "*to*

such an one and the Church in his house;" and "*from* such an one and the Church in his house;" the Church here evidently meaning nothing else than a Christian family. But what else is the Church than a society of Christians, united in the worship of God; and in what sense can a family be called a Church, except as its members are united in acts of social worship, thus forming a resemblance to a Church? So much in the way of example.

But do you ask for precepts requiring this duty? You shall have them. "Pray always with all prayer," says the Apostle. *All* prayer must include family prayer; and the word *always* has reference to the morning and evening sacrifice; and, therefore, plainly directs us to morning and evening prayer. The Lord's prayer is an express injunction of this duty; for it is introduced in the form of a precept. "After this manner pray ye." He had first given his disciples directions for solitary prayer; and here he changes the number from the singular to the plural, and directs them in regard to the duty of social worship. That this form is intended to guide us, not only in social, but *daily* prayer, is evident from the petition, "Give us this day our daily bread;" and that family prayer must here be principally intended, is evident from the fact already alluded to—that a family is the only so-

ciety that can meet for daily prayer. Again, in the Epistle to the Colossians, the Apostle, after having treated the various domestic and relative duties, subjoins the following precept: "Continuing instant in prayer, and watching in the same with thanksgiving." As he had been treating on the duties incumbent on families, it would be a forced construction to suppose that any thing else than family prayer is here intended. And finally, the Apostle Peter, after having pointed out the reciprocal duties of husbands and wives, directs them to regard each other as being heirs together of the grace of life; and the general reason which he assigns is, "That their prayers be not hindered." It has been justly remarked upon this passage, that "the necessity of a suitable performance of the duty of prayer is here made an argument for other domestic duties. An argument used to prove the obligation, or urge the practice of every duty, is always supposed to be more plain, if possible, than the duty recommended. When, therefore, the Apostle, from the danger of the interruption of their prayers, urges the wife to be subject to her husband, and him to give honour to her, he supposes it to be more obvious that they should live together in social prayer, than that she should be obedient to him, or that he should give honour to her."

Enough, I trust, has been said to satisfy you

that the plea that there is no warrant for this duty in Scripture, is utterly without foundation, and could never have been advanced, but from an aversion to the duty itself. There are some other objections that deserve consideration; but they must form the subject of another letter.

LETTER VI.

TO ONE WHO NEGLECTS FAMILY PRAYER.

In my last letter I considered, at some length, an objection that is sometimes made against the duty of family prayer—that there is no express warrant for it in the Bible. There are two or three other objections equally futile, which I will now endeavour to answer.

There are some—and, for aught I know, you may be one of this class—who plead a constitutional timidity and diffidence as a reason for the neglect of this duty. But let me ask, Does this timidity and diffidence extend to other things, especially to those things upon which your heart is strongly set? How is it in regard to your daily pursuits? Are you diffident in your worldly engagements; diffident in making your bargains; diffident in forming or executing plans for accumulating wealth, for increasing influence, or for any of the purposes of self-indulgence? Does the world regard you as a diffident man? Do you even regard yourself so on any other subject than this—at least on any that is not connected with some point of religious duty? If you can

hold up your head and be courageous any where else, how happens it that your courage all leaves you at the thought of approaching the domestic altar? Have you not reason to fear that that diffidence, which keeps you from this duty, is closely allied to that shame to which Jesus refers when he says: "Whosoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with his holy angels."

You say, perhaps, that you cannot find suitable thoughts and expressions for prayer. But have you no sins to be forgiven—no wants to be supplied—no blessings to be thankful for? If you have offended a fellow-mortal, and feel pressed with the duty of acknowledging your fault, have you no language in which to do it? If you greatly need some favour, which it is in the power of a fellow-mortal to bestow, have you no language in which to ask him for it? If you have actually had some great favour conferred upon you, which has brought your gratitude into lively exercise, have you no language in which to express your obligations? If you can be unembarrassed, and even fluent, in all these cases, wherefore is it that you have no thoughts, no expressions, appropriate to the corresponding duties which you owe to God? Let a person become deeply concerned for the salvation of his soul,

and do you think he will ordinarily want words in which to plead for forgiveness? Beware, lest your inability should prove to be an inability of the heart; lest the true reason why you cannot pray should be found at last to be that you do not desire to pray.

But suppose it to be otherwise, and from constitutional diffidence, or long continued habit, you really have not the power of rendering your family devotions an edifying exercise—there is still a remedy even for this difficulty; there are excellent forms of domestic worship into which you may throw the spirit of a fervent devotion; and though it were doubtless better, in all ordinary cases, that family prayer should be extemporaneous, yet I cannot doubt that a form may be used, often is used, to great advantage, and with the divine acceptance; so that here is a substitute provided for you—a help for your infirmities; and if you do not avail yourself of it, what becomes of your plea of inability to give a suitable direction to your thoughts, or to give utterance to your thoughts in appropriate expressions? If you refuse to perform this duty, even when these helps are provided for you, what else can we conclude than that your plea is insincere, and that it is used merely as an opiate to a wakeful conscience?

There is yet another objection which I have heard urged by some—namely, that they could

not perform this duty without meeting with opposition, if not being subjected to reproach and ridicule, from their own families.

But in reply to this, I would say that there is in the human heart an instinctive reverence for religion; so that it has sometimes been manifested even by infidels. It is not to be supposed, therefore, that children, in any ordinary circumstances, will venture to trifle with this duty, especially when it is associated with the dignity, tenderness, and authority of the parental character. And as for women, especially in our own country—enlightened and elevated as it is by an evangelical influence, it is a rare case that you will find one who will venture to discourage, in any direct manner, the duty of family devotion. But I would ask the person who offers this objection, whether he is really speaking from experience. Have you made the effort to bring your family around the domestic altar, and has it actually failed from their aversion to mingling in such a service? If you have not done this, make the trial, I entreat you, at once; and see if you do not have occasion to tell me, when I meet you, that, instead of opposition, you have found every encouragement you could desire in the discharge of this duty.

I leave this whole subject now with your conscience, earnestly hoping that it may not be in vain that it has been brought to your consideration.

LETTER VII.

TO ONE WHO TRAVELS ON THE SABBATH.

It is a subject of deep regret with many of your Christian friends, that you recently returned home from a journey on the Sabbath. It is understood, moreover, that you travelled on the Sabbath repeatedly during your absence; in short, that you have no scruples in spending God's holy day in this way, whenever your convenience may require. You cannot think it unreasonable, sustaining the relation to you that I do, that I should ask you to look at this matter in some of its more practical and solemn bearings.

There are those, I know, who deny that the Christian Sabbath has the sanction of divine authority; and, of course, whatever they may think of its importance as a human institution, they have no idea that any respect is due to it as an ordinance of God. This lax opinion in respect to the Sabbath prevails extensively, as you are doubtless aware, on the continent of Europe; and hence American Christians who travel in those countries are often shocked at the manner in which the Sabbath is treated, even by those

whose views of religious truth generally are in accordance with our own. But I have never understood that you had expressed any doubts as to the question whether or not the Christian Sabbath is a divine institution; and I shall take for granted, in this communication, that you do not feel any.

Is it not obvious, then, upon your own principles, that in travelling needlessly on the Sabbath, you offend directly against one of the laws of God —nay, that you do so deliberately, and with your eyes open? You profess to believe that God requires you to remember the Sabbath-day, to keep it holy; and yet, in the face of that command, you pervert it by needless travelling, to purposes of mere worldly gratification, or worldly profit. And are you, who have professed to be a servant of God, and have pledged yourself to walk in the way of his statutes, prepared thus to assume the attitude of a transgressor? Can you, while you thus deliberately violate one of the commandments, flatter yourself that you have really any regard to the divine authority? Do not your Sabbath-day journeys sometimes come as a most unwelcome subject of reflection at the communion table?

But you propound to me particular cases. You say you have been absent from your family for weeks, and you are impatient to see them; that

you know not but that some of them may be sick, and may require your presence and aid; and you ask me whether, in such a case, you are not at liberty to press on, even through the hours of the Sabbath, that you may reach them as early as possible. I answer, that if you have heard that any of them are seriously ill, or if you have any special reason for believing that they are, doubtless you are justified in continuing your journey on the Sabbath, that you may lose no time in being with them. But the mere *possibility* that this may be the case, because they live in a world in which there is more or less of sickness always, does not constitute even the semblance of a plea for your infringing on holy time. Still less is it to be admitted as a justifying circumstance, that your affection urges you forward to meet them, and that after an absence of many days or weeks, you know not how to submit to a longer separation. The same Being who gave you your natural affections to be indulged within proper limits, has ordained the Sabbath, and required your observance of it; and he does not allow any interference between your duty to your families and your duty to himself. If the Sabbath overtakes you when you are on a journey, you will render far better service to your families by pausing on your way, and commending them to God's blessing, than you will by hastening forward to meet

them, in violation of God's commandment. You are safe in acting upon the presumption that the Being whom you profess to serve, "will have mercy, and not sacrifice;" but you are not warranted in listening to the pleas of natural affection, when natural affection would justify what God's word absolutely forbids.

You propose another case. You find yourself distant a hundred and fifty miles from home on Saturday night; and you ask whether you are not justified in spending the night in a steamboat, and reaching home early the next morning, rather than remain where you are, and perhaps spend the Sabbath in a hotel. I am constrained to say, I think not. For, take the best view of the case you can, you certainly pervert several hours of the Sabbath to a worldly purpose; or if you say that you do nothing worse than sleep, the answer is, that the boat in which you travel is not managed by sleepers, and that you patronize a systematic violation of God's holy day. Besides, you are not hid among your fellow passengers; many of them know you, and some, at least, know that you are a professor of religion; and there are still more who will recognize you as such, when you leave the boat in the morning. The consequence is, that your example helps to lower the standard of the observance of the Sabbath. The man of the world, who, nevertheless,

has some reverence for holy time, in consequence, perhaps, of a religious education, will now set off on a journey on Sabbath morning, without scruple, and feel that he places himself under the wing of your example. Depend on it, in your walk from your landing place to your dwelling, you are a conspicuous object; and there are things said of you by some of the passers-by, that would make your ears tingle. I advise you, in all ordinary cases, to remain until Monday, wherever you are when Saturday night overtakes you. It will be a poor preparation for profiting by the privileges of the Sabbath, to spend its first hours in breaking God's holy law.

Let me say that, as there is a blessing promised to the faithful observance of the Sabbath, so you have a right to expect a *peculiar* blessing, when you observe it at what seems to be a manifest worldly sacrifice. One thing, at least, you are sure to accomplish—you render a testimony in favour of the Sabbath, which is of great importance, especially in this Sabbath-breaking age —you help to deepen the public sentiment as to its importance, and thus to throw a wall of fire around this divine institution. I knew an individual several years ago, who was travelling for the benefit of his health, in a part of one of the Middle States, in which the Sabbath was not much observed. The stage reached a certain place

late on a Saturday afternoon, and his fellow-passengers perceived that he was making his arrangements to stop; and as they knew he had not reached the end of his journey, they earnestly inquired the cause. He told them that the Sabbath was just at hand, and he felt under obligation to observe it. They thought it preposterous that he should make such a sacrifice, and to induce him to proceed, they told him that he could not find in that place even decent accommodations for a man in health, much less comfortable ones for an invalid, whereas, by going on with them, he would find himself early the next morning in a large town, where everything would be to his mind, and, withal, he would be there in time to attend church. The appeal, however, did not avail, and he stopped almost in the woods, and settled down to spend the Sabbath. The next day he met a little company of Christians in the neighbourhood, and engaged with them in social worship; and the day succeeding proceeded on his journey. In all this, he thought of nothing beyond keeping a conscience void of offence, in yielding to a divine requirement. But after many years had passed away, and he had even forgotten the name of the place at which he stopped, he met a gentleman who resided there at the time, and who asked him if he remembered the circumstance of his having once passed a Sabbath

there. On being answered in the affirmative, the gentleman remarked to him, "You have probably never known how much good you accomplished on that day. So uncommon was it for people in that part of the country to let the Sabbath detain them on a journey, that your example in the matter was talked about far and near; and while it came as a rebuke to the multitude, it came no less as an encouragement to the few who sympathized with you in your regard for this divine institution."

There is one effect which this loose way of treating the Sabbath must always have, which is exceedingly adverse to the general influence of the Church—it produces the impression that Christian principle is not so strong, but that it can easily yield to convenience. Your doctrine is that the Sabbath is to be kept holy; and if any body were to teach a contrary doctrine, you would, perhaps, be shocked at it; nevertheless, if you have any worldly object to accomplish, you can reach home on the Sabbath, or you can leave home on the Sabbath, as if there were no divine prohibition in your way. "What sort of a religion," asks a scrutinizing and cavilling world, "is that which obeys the divine commands only when it is convenient? What sort of a conscience is that which accepts as an apology for breaking the fourth commandment, the prospect of some worldly

advantage? Is it not safe to neglect a religion which sits so easily upon its professors as this?" True, there is nothing in this reasoning but falsehood and absurdity; but who would wish to give occasion for it?—who would willingly be responsible for the consequences of it?

LETTER VIII.

TO ONE WHO NEGLECTS THE WEEK-DAY SERVICES OF THE CHURCH.

I AM no advocate for erecting false standards of Christian character. I would be far from depriving any man of his Christian liberty, in respect to matters concerning which there are only general directions in the word of God. Least of all would I venture to say that, unless an individual enters fully into my views of Christian intercourse or social worship, and attends all the meetings during the week that I may think would be useful to him, he ought to be regarded as making shipwreck of Christian obligation. I freely acknowledge that I have not so learned Christ. In all matters in which God has not spoken definitely, I would say, let every man examine for himself, and be fully persuaded in his own mind; and though he may reach a conclusion, or adopt a course, which may not seem to me fully to harmonize with the general spirit of the divine requirements, yet, if I cannot point to an actual prohibition, it is with an ill grace, surely, that I call in question, on this ground, his claims to the character of a Christian.

Now, it must be acknowledged that among the matters which God has left, in a great degree, to the control of human prudence, is the regulation of the social religious services proper to be observed by Christians during the week. It must be acknowledged, also, that, in later years especially, a disposition has been manifested in many churches, to multiply these extra services to an injudicious and hurtful extreme; and that the effect of it has been actually to disparage God's own institutions. But while this tendency is greatly to be deprecated, I suppose there are very few members of evangelical Churches who would be willing to dispense with all such services—who would not feel as if the prosperity of religion was, in some degree, identified with occasional meetings of Christians on week-days, for social religious improvement. And if such services are to be encouraged at all, I take for granted, that a single lecture and a prayer-meeting or two, in the course of the week, could not be considered as in any degree extravagant. This, I believe, is about what exists in your own Church; and yet you do not think proper to encourage any of these services by your presence.

Allow me, first of all, to inquire whether you do not think it important that these meetings should be kept up; and if your minister should announce from the pulpit, that hereafter there

would be no social religious exercises, except on the Sabbath, would you not feel in your heart that it augured ill to the interests of religion among you? Nay, would you not be ready to say, "If this man is unwilling to keep up the week-day services of the Church, let us exchange him for one who will not show himself a patron of any such innovations?" But how could you say this with the least shadow of consistency, so long as you never attend upon any of these exercises yourself? If they are important to others—and of this you do not profess to doubt—they are just as important to you; and yet your conduct would seem to imply that they are of no importance to you whatever. I am glad that you are right on this subject, even in theory; but you cannot but see that there is a sad contradiction between your theory and your practice. If all were to do as you do, the meetings would be discontinued, however much your minister might do to sustain them.

But you tell me that these meetings are designed for persons who have more leisure than you are able to command. You are immersed in business; and when the hour for the meeting comes round, you have worldly engagements that you cannot set aside; and though you wish well to the meeting, you cannot possibly find time to attend it. But wherefore is it, let me ask, that

you are burdened by these ever recurring engagements? I will tell you. It is because you have voluntarily admitted them as part of the economy of your life; it is because you have so arranged your plans that the carrying of them out occupies time which you ought to devote to other and higher purposes. What you ought to do, and what you might easily still do, would be to adjust your worldly concerns, with reference to these social religious services; and if your attendance upon them were to be regarded as coming into the regular routine of your weekly engagements, the difficulty of which you complain would soon cease to be felt. Besides, when you plead the want of time, is there nothing in your experience to give to this plea the character of inconsistency —nothing to suggest a doubt whether you may not have deceived yourself in urging it? Let me ask, are you equally pressed for time when other matters claim your attention? If some splendid concert of music attracts you, or if you are invited to some political meeting, or to some brilliant scene in the world of fashion, do you excuse yourself on the ground of your multiplied engagements? or do you not rather find it an easy matter to put your engagements aside, until you shall have drunk the cup of pleasure that is proffered to you? What becomes now of your excuse, that you have no time to attend a lecture or a

prayer-meeting? If the lecture or the prayer-meeting were as much to your taste as a political gathering or a party of pleasure, would you be likely to complain of the want of leisure in the former case, any more than in the latter?

I cannot but think that your course is greatly prejudicial to your own interests as a Christian. In the first place, if it is really dictated by a spirit of indifference to religious exercises, have you not reason to fear that that spirit is to be taken as an indication that you are a stranger to true religion? Certainly the least unfavourable inference that you can draw from it is, that religion is at a low ebb in your heart, and that your Christian graces are undergoing a temporary eclipse. But another and highly important view of the case is this—if you are a true Christian, you need all the helps which are afforded by these services to enable you to withstand the constant pressure of worldly influence, incident to your daily occupation. If, once or twice in the week, you can turn your ear away from the din of the world, to the voice of prayer or of Christian instruction, it will serve to keep in more vigorous exercise your sense of Christian responsibility; it will divest worldly care, in a great measure, of its ensnaring influence, and will impart to your general character a consistency and efficiency which, under other circumstances, it would be little likely to exhibit.

I hardly need add, that those with whom you are associated in Christian fellowship are far from being indifferent to your course on this subject. They have a right to expect that you will be a fellow-worker with them to the kingdom of God. When they meet together to hear God's word, or to pray for a divine influence upon themselves or others, they look round for you, and the fact that they never see you there, is a perpetual burden upon their spirits. Even though you may not value the privilege as they do, yet is there not something due to the relation you sustain to them as a brother in Christ? Would it not minister to your own enjoyment to reflect that you were contributing to encourage and strengthen others in that habit of devotion and spirituality in which are bound up, in so great a degree, both the Christian's comfort and usefulness?

LETTER IX.

TO ONE WHO FREQUENTS FASHIONABLE PARTIES.

I REMEMBER the time when you first publicly entered into covenant with God. In the conversation which I had with you, previous to that important step, you stated to me that it was your firm purpose to have nothing more to do with the gay world. You said that you had wasted time enough already in scenes of frivolity, and that whatever of life remained to you, you intended to spend in a more rational and sober way. I did not doubt that you were sincere in all that you said, nor do I doubt it now. Nevertheless, you cannot but be aware that a great change has come over you. Notwithstanding your strong resolution to the contrary, you have actually plunged into the gaieties of life, and your relish for worldly pleasure seems to have revived in all its strength. You have become just what you once resolved you never would become—a gay professor of religion. I hear of you in scenes of fashionable amusement, and in the great gatherings that take place for the waste of time, and for physical, intellectual, and moral prostration, as

frequently as I hear of any who do not profess to be living for any object apart from the present world.

I beg to say, at the outset, that I am not at all unfriendly to a free, and, if you please, extended social intercourse, provided it be conducted on principles which Christianity does not disown, and which do not tend to results that jeopard the interests of vital and practical religion. I can see no reason why there may not be a considerable gathering of friends, for general and cheerful intercourse, and everything connected with it be conducted in such a manner, that each shall go away feeling that he has been not only innocently, but profitably employed. There is something in the interchange of kind affections and expressions of good will, in looking upon cheerful faces, and conversing upon the topics of the day, that is fitted to relieve from the tedium of care, and invigorate both the physical and intellectual system. And even though religion should not come up as a distinct subject of conversation, still the moral and spiritual man receives benefit rather than sustains injury; for the general quickening impulse that is communicated both to the body and to the mind, reaches also to the heart, inasmuch as the occasion itself supplies fresh materials to the spirit of devout gratitude. When I see a Christian disposed to live

the life of a recluse, never venturing a step into the world, lest he should go a step too far, I always feel that, however praiseworthy may be his motives, he is actually dishonouring his mission as a friend of Christ. He is really declining an important field of usefulness; for if he refuses all contact with his neighbours, except as he is obliged to meet them on business, or as he approaches them directly in regard to their higher interest, he can have little hope of benefitting them even by his most faithful and earnest efforts. I trust I have said enough to satisfy you that I would not, either by precept or example, oppose any obstacle to a well regulated social intercourse.

But you cannot but be aware that such meetings as I have now referred to are something quite different from the fashionable parties of the present day. My first objection to these is, that they involve enormous expense; and not unfrequently the amount expended would be enough to sustain a Christian missionary a whole year; and at a period when the fields are already white to the harvest, as they are at the present day, I cannot but think that this consideration must weigh heavily upon every enlightened Christian conscience. Then the lateness of the hour is an objection. You are not allowed to go until the legitimate hour has come for going to rest; and if you are at home by one or two o'clock in the morning,

nobody thinks of accusing you of having kept late hours. And how has the intervening period been spent? Why, in a scene that resembled Bedlam more than anything else. Two or three hundred voices commingle like the sound of many waters, and it is with difficulty that you can distinguish even your own. You look round for a resting-place, but there is none—there is no chair to tempt you to so vulgar a thing as sitting down. You would like to exercise by walking—possibly you may have the chance; but possibly you may not; possibly there is not a spot, except in the apartment where the dancing is going on, in which you could move voluntarily either forward or backward. You would like, at least, to have the privilege of standing still; but, alas! there is a pressure on every side of you that you strive in vain to resist; and it would not be strange if you should sometimes be raised upward and borne onward, despite of all your powers of moral agency. The time comes for the entertainment—it is luxurious and splendid, and it has been the work of days to prepare it; but you can scarcely use your hands any more than if you were manacled; and you may congratulate yourself if some unfortunate dish is not upset upon your yet more unfortunate dress. The hour at length arrives when you may retire; and you go away with your animal system completely exhausted, and without having ac-

complished one of the legitimate purposes of social intercourse. Instead of having your spirits recruited and your faculties invigorated for the appropriate duties of the next day, the morning finds you with your energies all relaxed; and if you awake, it is perhaps only to resolve that the day shall pay back to you the repose of which the night has robbed you. You do not expect to be fit for much service of any kind the next day. It is a sufficient excuse for your declining any serious demand that is made upon your faculties, that you were out nearly all the preceding night at a party.

Now, there are two views to be taken of this matter, either of which, it seems to me, must at least embarrass an enlightened and wakeful conscience—I refer to its influence upon yourself, and its influence upon others. The fact that you can allow yourself to mingle in such scenes, would indeed seem to show that you have already declined greatly in the spirit of religion, if you have not actually surrendered all claim to Christian character. But as I take for granted you still intend to hold fast to the form of a Christian profession, let me ask whether you are not conscious yourself that the spirit of worldliness is constantly gaining ascendency over you; and that your religious enjoyment and general Christian activity and circumspection are proportionably

on the wane. Do you not sometimes, at least, have to listen to the remonstrances of your conscience? When you have come back from one of these scenes of midnight dissipation, and have attempted to go through the form of devotion, before closing your eyes in sleep, have you not felt that you were poorly prepared for any such exercise? and have you not, sometimes, felt the sting of remorse so keenly that you could not command your accustomed repose? Do you not have seasons when you look back with pain to the time, when both your principles and your feelings kept you away from these scenes of gaiety? and do you not reckon the period at which you entered them as marking a sad epoch in your religious life? What have you to expect, if you continue in this course, but that you will depart farther and farther from the spirit and example of Christ, from the line of your duty as a disciple of Christ, and will arm conscience with bitter accusations to urge against you, on your passage into eternity?

But your conduct, in this respect, has an important bearing upon others. You are the head of a family; and how could you more distinctly tell your children, whom you have dedicated to God, that they need not look beyond the world for enjoyment, than you do by thus conforming to the world yourself? You contribute greatly to encourage and strengthen other worldly pro-

fessors, who fall into the same course; and while you are looking at their example as a justification of yourself, they are turning your example to account in a similar way. And then there are others associated with you in Christian fellowship, who witness, or rather hear of, your delinquency with the bitterest regret—they feel that you are inflicting a deep wound upon that cause to which you are professedly devoted—they look upon you as opposing their own good influence, rather than helping it—as exerting yourself in aid of the kingdom of darkness, rather than of the kingdom of light; and they often, in anguish of spirit, remember you upon their knees, when none but the all-seeing eye beholds them. And last, though not least, you hereby make yourself a stumbling block to the world. They look exultingly on and see you forgetting your Christian obligations, and plunging into their own amusements; for though they are trumpet-tongued, to proclaim your inconsistency, they are glad to take shelter under the wing of your example. More than once have I been told, by an anxious sinner who has come to me for counsel, that he had, at some previous time, been affected in a similar way, and that awful apprehensions of the future had sometimes come over his mind, even in the haunts of worldly vanity; but that when he looked round, and saw one and another whom he was accustomed to see

at the communion table, apparently enjoying the scene with as keen a relish as any others, he found little difficulty in putting his gloomy forebodings to flight, and settling down again in his accustomed carelessness.

But you tell me that, unless you mingle in the fashionable parties of the day, you must necessarily exclude yourself from society; as this is at present almost the only mode in which social intercourse, especially in the higher circles, is kept up. But if you are satisfied that it is wrong, as I think you must be, upon sober reflection, then you are bound to avoid it, even at the expense of being singular; for you remember upon what authority it is said, "Thou shalt not follow the multitude to do evil." If all are going wrong, there never will be a reformation, unless somebody has the courage to stand alone in doing right; and why should not you occupy this noble ground as well as any other person? If you will only take the stand, you may find many more than you have dreamed of, who will be ready to second you; and thus you may take the lead in a reform in social intercourse, and it may be carried forward much more easily than you imagine. But the state of things, after all, is by no means what the objection supposes. There are many Christians—I may say, all the truly spiritual members of the Church—who would cordially join with

you in a more quiet and reasonable mode of visiting; and perhaps, if you had been more familiar with the course of this class of your fellow-Christians, you would have felt that there is much less ground for the objection than you now suppose.

I am aware that it is impossible to lay down very definite rules on this subject, and that it would be unreasonable to bring every case, independently of peculiar circumstances, to precisely the same standard. But if you honestly believe that any party to which you are invited is likely, on the whole, to exert an injurious influence upon yourself, or upon other professors, or upon non-professors, you cannot, I think, doubt that it is your duty to decline it. Accustom yourself to acknowledge God on this subject, as well as every other, and if you can intelligently and conscientiously ask his blessing upon any scene of amusement in which you are asked to mingle, you will probably hazard little in accepting the invitation.

LETTER X

TO ONE WHO COMPLAINS OF THE WANT OF INTELLECTUAL PREACHING.

In various conversations that I have had with you, I have noticed, not without much concern, the manner in which you speak of the public services of most of the clergymen whose ministry you attend. You scarcely ever speak of a sermon in any other than a disrespectful tone. I do not hear you complain of any lack of evangelical truth, or of any want of simplicity, perspicuity, or directness, in the manner of exhibiting it; but you are accustomed to speak of almost every sermon as tame and common-place; and when you happen to hear one of an abstract and philosophical character, you have no language in which to express your admiration of it; you say *that* is the preaching for *you*—it is something to set the mind to work; and one such sermon is worth more to you than scores of those you commonly hear. You must allow me to say that I think you have fallen into a serious error on this subject, and I trust you will pardon a little plain dealing in respect to it.

But first of all, let me say, that I am far enough from being an advocate for what may reasonably be called superficial preaching. The gospel is a great mine of religious truth; and that preacher who should be satisfied always to skim, and never to dig—who should feel that in dealing out a few threadbare common-places, he was rightly dividing the word of truth, would never either come up to the spirit of his commission, or satisfy an intelligent Christian audience. I care not how much truth—even profound truth—a minister may bring out in his discourses, provided it be legitimately deduced from the written word—what I object to, but what I understand you to approve is, the substitution of a dreamy philosophical speculation for real Scripture verities—a splendid mist, upon which only a little sunlight has fallen, for the clear and full shining of divine revelation.

I am going to make a remark for which, if it seems severe, you must forgive me; for my conviction of its importance to you is so strong, that I cannot withhold it. It is, that you do not yourself more than half understand what you profess so highly to admire. I certainly give you credit for at least the ordinary measure of capacity and intelligence; but when I have seen you go off into an ecstacy about a sermon, which men of the most gifted and cultivated minds who heard

it, have pronounced quite unintelligible, I have shrewdly suspected that you would find yourself in an awkward attitude, if you should be called upon—I will not say to give an outline—but even to tell what had been the subject of the discourse. There are one or two preachers, of whose praise, I observe, you never grow weary, whose sermons are so splendidly obscure that there would be little danger in their preaching positive error; for I know very few people who even profess to understand them.

If I should attempt to trace this infirmity of yours—for that surely is the least severe epithet I can apply to it—to its true source, I am afraid that I should have to refer it to an overweening vanity, of which, possibly, you have not suspected yourself to be the subject. To demand and to relish a highly intellectual preacher, seems to be an indication of a highly intellectual taste—it seems to say that however a plain Gospel sermon may do for the mass of hearers, yet you, with faculties of a higher order, aspire to something not exactly within the reach of the common mind. I leave you to judge whether this does not point to a trait of character that needs to be corrected.

But this habit, besides having its origin in thinking more highly of yourself than you ought to think, allow me to say, is most adverse to a

proper improvement of the preaching of the Gospel. What is the great end of the Christian ministry? Nothing else than to persuade men to be reconciled to God, and to build up believers in the most holy faith. And in order to accomplish these objects, God's truth must be presented in its naked simplicity; for in no other way does it operate, either as the sword of the Spirit, or as the aliment of the renewed nature. But such preaching as you like best, could never produce any such effect as this. Admitting even that it was nothing but what should be philosophically true, and nothing but what you were able to grasp, still, it would not be the kind of truth which would be fitted to act upon your heart and conscience. If it made you a keener metaphysician, it would not make you a better Christian. I will venture even to refer to your own experience on the subject, and to inquire whether you do not feel conscious that those very sermons which you have applauded most highly, for the profound thought which they have embodied, have done nothing to quicken your moral sensibilities, and have supplied no new motives to a life of holiness. It is a great privilege to have the Gospel preached to you; and if, instead of accepting it in its simplicity and purity, you are for ever calling for something that lies beyond the bounds of Gospel truth, in the region of metaphysical speculation,

you do nothing better than starve your own soul. The principle of spiritual life disdains such support as this. It can be sustained and advanced by God's living truth, and nothing else.

There is another thing which you are bound to consider. Admitting that you do not overrate your own intellectual capacity, you cannot but be sensible that the kind of preaching that you call for, would be utterly beyond the comprehension of the great mass of hearers. If you speak to an individual, your object and your expectation is that he should not only hear, but understand you, and if you fail of this, you might as well have said nothing. The same remark applies to the preacher of the Gospel. He is addressing a congregation on the most important of all subjects; and in order that he may profit them, he must speak to their comprehension. Be it so that you and half a dozen others could understand and appreciate abstract reasonings, involving the remoter relations of things; yet so long as nearly all his hearers could not, would it be either wise or benevolent that he should sacrifice the edification and profit of the mass, to the gratification of so small a minority? Is he not rather bound to speak to the common intelligence, and for the common benefit? especially as it is one glorious characteristic of the true Gospel that it adapts itself, in the very same provision,

to the humblest and the loftiest capacity alike. I have heard some of the most intellectual men whom I ever knew, express their earnest disapprobation of bringing philosophical speculations into the pulpit, on the ground, first, that they were something distinct from evangelical truth; and next, that they were something beyond the reach of the common mind. It is a striking fact that the great Edwards, than whom, perhaps, no individual has shown higher powers of abstract ratiocination, has never given a sentence to the world in any of his sermons, which a person of good common sense could not easily take up and apply.

Let me say one word here in behalf of ministers. You cannot but see that if there were no other difficulty in the way, it would be utterly impossible that they should meet the demand you make upon them, but at the expense of rendering themselves comparatively useless to much the larger portion of their hearers. At the same time you, and others who join with you, expose them, in many cases, to strong temptation; their desire to gratify you may lead them too far, and I think I have known some instances in which it has led to the formation of a habit that has proved greatly adverse to the general good effect of their preaching. Whether you regard their comfort and usefulness, or your own edification, or the benefit of

the great mass who are associated with you in the enjoyment of Christian privileges, let me counsel you to encourage, in every way you can, the preaching of the simple truth as it is in Jesus.

LETTER XI.

TO ONE OF A PENURIOUS SPIRIT.

THERE is no doubt that economy, when practised on right principles, and with right motives, is to be considered a Christian virtue; but where it degenerates into parsimony, as it too often does; where a calculating spirit freezes the heart, and clenches the hand, and exhibits man as a mere embodiment of selfishness, it works evil to every interest that it touches. Where anything like this is witnessed in a professor of religion, it is alike disastrous to his character and his usefulness.

It is matter of great grief to me, in common with many of your Christian friends, that you are thought to be not altogether free from this unhallowed spirit. I do not pretend to speak from what I have seen, so much as from what I have heard; but unless great injustice is done you, in the estimate that is formed of your character by some who have the best opportunity of knowing, you are vulnerable here at several different points.

If I am correctly informed, you have not shown yourself ready to bear your proportion in sustain-

ing the institutions of religion in the Church with which you are immediately connected. You do not wish to have the means of grace in any degree diminished; you do not complain that your minister is not sufficiently attentive to his duties, or even that the salary which he receives is more than an adequate support; but still you are not willing to bear your part of the pecuniary burden; and when you are applied to on the subject, you sometimes evince a degree of impatience and restlessness, that is as unbecoming yourself as it is painful to others. But herein you offend—I will not say, against charity, but against simple justice. You enjoy the preaching of the Gospel, and the benefit of your minister's labours in other respects, as a member of a religious society; and you are bound to share your proportion of the expense, just as truly as you are bound to pay for anything that you bargain for in your private capacity. Remember that the man who comes to ask for your aid in this matter does not come to ask a favour of you—it is simply that you should pay your equitable dues; and what they are, it can be no difficult matter for you to decide, if you will look honestly and impartially at the data within your reach. And let me say that, in refusing this demand that is made upon you, you place your Christian character in a most undesirable light before the world. You give

just occasion to the world to question your integrity; and you may be assured that they do question it, though they may never do it to your face. Perhaps I shall surprise you when I tell you that I have actually heard men, who make not the smallest pretension to religion themselves, refer to your case as a proof of the little influence that religion exercises over its professors; and I have even heard them say, sneeringly, that they were giving their money to secure the ordinances of the Gospel to a professing Christian, whose contribution was a mere pittance, though he was quite as able to contribute as themselves.

I hear it said, also, that you minister with a very sparing hand to the great objects of Christian benevolence. A feeble Church applies to you for aid in securing to itself the benefit of Christian ordinances, and you coolly answer that you have as much as you can do to sustain the Gospel at home. You are asked to help the cause of Foreign Missions, and it turns out that all your sympathies are with Domestic Missions, and you can see no reason for going to the ends of the earth in pursuit of heathen, when they abound at our own doors. The Bible Society makes its claim upon you, but everybody gives for *that;* and what you have to bestow you choose to reserve for some less popular object. The cause of education comes along, and you set that aside,

on the ground that there are hundreds of ministers who are unemployed; or else that *they* make the best ministers who are educated by their own unassisted efforts. Even the half-starved beggar, who stops at your door, if he happens to meet you, soon learns, by your repulsive manner, that he must go farther before he can expect his wants to be supplied. I do not mean to say that you give absolutely nothing to these or other kindred objects; but I mean to say that your contributions are, at best, miserably stinted; and that what you do give does not seem to have that most desirable accompaniment—a willing mind.

Here, again, you may rest assured that your conduct is quite unworthy of your profession. You are not, indeed, required to give what you do not possess; you are not required to give to others that which is necessary to the support of your own family; but you *are* bound, by every Christian obligation, to help the cause of God, the cause of humanity, by your pecuniary contributions, according as the Lord prospers you; and, in refusing to meet this claim, you darken your own evidences; you close against yourself a legitimate source of Christian enjoyment; you diminish your influence with both the Church and the world, and lead even bad men to congratulate themselves that they are both more liberal and more exemplary than you. You may rest assured

that every Christian interest pertaining to your character, your comfort, your usefulness, suffers in consequence of your thus withholding what God requires of you.

I must hint at one thing more in this connection—it is that you are charged with something more than exactness—positive meanness, in the ordinary transactions of life. That you may know precisely what I mean, I will say that I heard of your calling upon an individual to whom you were under great obligations for important services that he had rendered you, to pay you *six pence*, which was your due, in some pecuniary transaction which you had had with him some months before. And even this is not the minimum of the small things which I have heard alleged against you. I have been informed, upon good authority, that you went soberly to a very respectable person, with whom you had had some dealings in the way of trade, after the circumstance had nearly faded from the individual's memory, and said:—"Do you not remember that there was a cent coming to me in our settlement! I will thank you to pay me that cent." I am sorry to say, that if I were disposed, I could add several other things as being commonly reported of you, that would not suffer in point of smallness with those which I have mentioned. Now let me say that you indulge this spirit at too great an expense.

You are a loser, in a mere worldly point of view; it is not unlikely that you lose the opportunity of honestly making a dollar or a pound; for when you have treated an individual in this manner once, you may be assured that it must be a case of urgent necessity, on his part, that would ever lead him to consent to have any further pecuniary dealings with you. And besides, a few cases of this kind will fix your character, so that others will be equally shy of coming in contact with you in the way of business. But this is the least of the evils attending it—it greatly impairs your general influence in the community—especially it mars your Christian character, and renders you comparatively powerless in many cases, where you might otherwise make yourself most advantageously felt. I am not pleading for a lax way of transacting business, nor for an ostentatious neglect of small matters; for I well know that there is no such thing as doing any kind of business successfully, without attending to minute details; what I object to is, that extreme exactness which is represented by the cases I have referred to, and which the whole world would agree in stigmatizing as the index of a penurious spirit. These things might, indeed, be pardoned if they were not so entirely in keeping with every thing else in relation to you which has respect to money; but even if charity were to dispose of them on the ground

of your having formed a habit of great exactness, I fear that this would not essentially relieve the matter, as she would have other things to account for, concerning which no such apology could be admitted.

I have felt constrained to deal with you thus plainly, from a conviction that you really are not aware what a sacrifice you are making to this unworthy spirit. I do not undertake to say how far its prevalence may consist with true piety; but I am sure that your experience has already proved that it is not consistent with the highest degree of usefulness, or with the dignity that should always pertain to the Christian character. I advise you to make vigorous efforts, in dependence on divine grace, to cast out this foul, mean spirit from your bosom.

LETTER XII.

TO ONE OF A CENSORIOUS SPIRIT.

I HAVE noticed in you, for a considerable time, a growing disposition, which I fear is becoming a settled habit, to deal in undue severity with the characters of your fellow men. It is a rare thing that I hear you speak well of any body. Whenever an individual is mentioned, and especially when any thing praiseworthy is said of him, it seems as if your mind was immediately on the stretch for something of an opposite character; and if nothing of this kind readily occurs to you as a matter of fact, you do not hesitate to indulge in unworthy and injurious conjectures. If a person has performed a highly meritorious action, you attribute it to some dishonourable and selfish motive; if he has done something of an equivocal character, you seem to delight to put the worst construction upon it; if he has failed, from considerations of prudence, to act in difficult circumstances, you reproach him for a timid or temporizing spirit; if he takes a bold and decisive step in such circumstances, you charge him with rashness and recklessness. In short, you are for ever

hunting after "dead flies in the apothecary's ointment." You seem not to breathe freely except amidst the errors and foibles of your fellow men.

Now, the most obvious thing to be said of this characteristic is, that it is exceedingly unamiable. You cannot find any body that likes it; nor do you yourself like it in others, much as you may cherish and justify it in yourself. I do not say that it is not possible to possess it, and to possess good qualities along with it; but let the character, in other respects, be what it may—nobody will ever think it amiable—it will always carry with it an air of repulsion.

And while this is not an amiable trait, neither is it in accordance with the precepts and genius of Christianity. The leading element of the Gospel is love—its origin is love—its spirit is love—its end is love. The blessed Saviour, while he was on earth, though he was a most faithful and earnest reprover of sin in every form, was yet a wonderful example of kindness, and forbearance, and charity. The Apostles also evinced the same spirit, as well in their conduct as in their teachings. Indeed, the whole tendency of Christianity, in both its doctrines and precepts, is to lead us to form the most charitable judgments of our fellow men, that truth and reason will justify; and never to proclaim our surmises to the disadvantage of another, when we cannot be certain that they are

well founded, and when, even if they are, no good can result from our publishing them. The great rule which Christ has given us for the regulation of our social conduct is, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even the same to them." No one wishes to be the object of perpetual censure and crimination. No one wishes to have his actions misrepresented, or his motives arraigned, by ungracious insinuations. No one wishes, after he has done the best that he is capable of doing, to be looked coldly upon, as if he were at least worthy of suspicion, if not an acknowledged malefactor. In indulging in this conduct towards another, then, you not only violate a principle which your own conscience must recognize as a rule of right, but you come in conflict with the fundamental principle of practical Christianity. You thus far disown the authority of the Master whom you profess to serve.

It is not one of the least of the evils connected with the spirit which I am considering, that it interferes greatly with your general Christian influence. The most striking illustration of this that I remember to have known, was in the case of an individual, long since passed away, who occupied the important position of an elder in a Presbyterian Church. It was always a matter of surprise to me that he should ever have been made an elder; but as he had been one from the

organization of the Church, I suppose it must have been from the paucity of materials out of which to form a session. He had, naturally, a sarcastic turn, and he seemed to have trained himself, from early life, to the indulgence of it. He indulged it continually before he came into the Church, and he indulged it afterwards, and he never ceased to indulge it so long as the power of speech remained to him. I scarcely ever heard him render a favourable testimony concerning a human being. If you mentioned an excellence in any character, he had always some blemish at hand with which to offset it; or if you mentioned a defect, he would instantly mention another, and a greater, unless, indeed, he might choose to indulge his ruling passion by taking an attitude of contradiction against yourself. The consequence was that he really enjoyed the friendship of nobody. He grew more and more an Ishmaelite, in both the Church and civil society, until at length, though he was still an elder in the Church, he was really a man by himself. Nobody asked his counsel in difficulty; nobody looked to him for consolation in sorrow; nobody cared to meet him even on the highway. He was naturally a man of vigorous intellect, and capable of extensive usefulness; but his inveterate habit of sarcasm and crimination made him a sort of terror even to his own friends. If this is an extreme

case, as doubtless it is, yet it shows you at least what you are in danger of; it admonishes you to crucify this unhallowed propensity, as you would accomplish the great end of a Christian profession.

It is possible that you may justify yourself, in a censorious habit, on the ground that men's characters are so bad that truth and justice forbid you to speak well of them; and that in your honest, and what may seem to others severe, utterances, you are only evincing a higher degree of Christian fidelity than professors of religion generally exhibit. But herein I am afraid that you greatly deceive yourself. I fear you are actually making a self-righteousness of the indulgence of a naturally bad temper. You may rest assured that fidelity in dealing with the errors and delinquencies of others is one thing—uncharitableness and censoriousness quite another. Never was there such honesty and faithfulness in any reprover as in the Saviour of the world; and yet never was there such melting tenderness. If you are really actuated by a sense of Christian obligation in this matter, you will administer reproofs, when you are called to administer them, in the spirit of love; you will not needlessly speak of the faults of others when they are not present; and when there exists a necessity for your doing it, you will still show by your manner that you are

moved by that charity that thinketh no evil. I am constrained to say that you have seemed to me to be actuated by a different spirit; and sometimes, when an individual whom you have assailed has been successfully vindicated in your presence, I have thought it was a source of positive mortification to you.

I must not omit to say that the spirit which I have been reprobating is sure to beget its like. If you allow yourself indiscriminately to censure others, you can calculate on nothing else than that the measure which you mete to them will be returned upon yourself. The peace of a neighbourhood, the peace of a Church, the peace of a community, is often sacrificed to the unchristian temper, the ungoverned tongue, of a single individual; for though many tongues may be ultimately employed in the same way, yet there was some one, from which the spark flew, out of which has grown this wide moral conflagration.

Let me add, that you will not be likely to reform in this matter, except as the result of great watchfulness, and persevering, vigorous effort. You must obey the inspired direction, to set a watch at the door of your lips. You must resolve never to speak ill of any body, unless upon grounds which you can fully justify to an enlightened Christian judgment and conscience. You must bring yourself under the influence of all

those considerations, drawn from a sense of your own manifold imperfections and infirmities, from the precepts and example of Christ, and from your relation to the Church and to society, which are fitted to keep in check, or rather to eradicate, this unchristian temper. Above all, you are habitually to ask of God that he will increase your power of resistance to this spiritual foe ; and you are never to relax in the conflict, until you can feel that it is finally and for ever dislodged.

LETTER XIII.

TO ONE OF A SELF-CONFIDENT AND UNYIELDING SPIRIT.

EVERY man who is not recreant to all his social obligations, is entitled, as a member of society, to a certain degree of consideration and influence; but there are some men who are not satisfied with what they can legitimately claim in this respect; their whole life seems to be an unceasing struggle to bring other men's opinions into harmony with their own. Let them be in whatever company they may, it is manifest that they are aiming at superiority. They speak on every subject with a sort of oracular assurance. If one ventures to question the correctness of their opinions, even in respect to matters of which they have had little opportunity to form a judgment, he quickly finds that he must be brow-beaten into silence, or else nerve himself to encounter a protracted, not to say angry opposition. It happens not unfrequently that men of this class are confident in proportion to their ignorance, and that, in endeavouring to carry a point by storm, they really expose themselves to ridicule and contempt.

Now it will, perhaps, surprise you to know that

many of your friends think that you are vulnerable, in no inconsiderable degree, at this point; that you expect too much deference from other minds, not at all inferior to your own; in short, that, like Diotrephes of old, you love to have the pre-eminence. They say that you are impatient whenever any of your positions are questioned; that you look coldly upon those who cannot always see with your eyes; and that, in some matters of considerable practical moment, you have refused to act at all, because in certain unimportant details, you were not permitted to have your own way. I have too much reason to believe that the impression that exists concerning you is not exaggerated. You must pardon me for saying that I have myself witnessed that in your conduct which fully justifies it.

The least reflection, I think, must satisfy you that this characteristic does not bespeak any exuberance of modesty or humility. It is virtually saying that you have a quicker discernment, a more mature judgment, a more vigorous or grasping intellect, than those with whom you are associated; for if this were not so, why should their opinion or will bend to yours, rather than you yield to them? If you differ in opinion from others with whom you are called to act, you have a right indeed to say so, and to state the grounds of your dissent, and to do

what you can fairly, in vindication of the measures that you prefer; and more than this, you have a right, undoubtedly, in obedience to the honest dictates of your conscience, to refuse your active co-operation; and all this may be done without subjecting yourself to the charge of an overweening vanity; but if you are extremely tenacious upon small matters; if you discover a morbid sensitiveness whenever one ventures to question your judgment; if you show that you would prefer to see an important object sacrificed rather than to have it gained by a departure from the course which you have marked out, then do you give the most decisive evidence that you are not minding that exhortation of the apostle, "Let not a man think more highly of himself than he ought to think." Whatever may be your attainments in respect to other graces, you may rest assured that you are not perfected in the grace of humility.

In yielding to this temper, you offend not only against charity, but against justice. You are not satisfied with the measure of control that really belongs to you—you eagerly aspire to something more; and herein what better do you show yourself than a usurper? Those with whom you are connected, whether in Christian or civil society, have precisely the same rights, growing out of their relationship to society, that you have; but

in your desire to have the pre-eminence, you infringe upon those rights, and forget the golden rule of doing to others as you would that they should do to you. You are abroad in the world as a sort of pirate; you would rob others of their influence, and enrich yourself with the spoils.

It is scarcely necessary to add that this spirit is utterly at war with the genius of social happiness and improvement—it works evil towards all the great interests of society. If you have a right to dictate imperiously to your associates and equals, they have exactly the same right thus to dictate to you; and if they avail themselves of it, it is easy to see that it must be at the expense of perpetual disquietude and wrangling; of keeping alive and hot the coals of strife. But the truth is, neither you nor they have any such right. As members of society, you are all bound to consider the common weal; to live in habits of mutual condescension; to exert all the good influence you can, fairly and honourably; while you are imperatively forbidden to assume the character of a dictator, or to overlook or undervalue the reasonable claims of others.

It deserves your particular consideration, that this spirit, which I am condemning, is almost sure to defeat its own ends. The man who is not disposed to claim more than fairly belongs to him, and who chooses rather to remain in the back-

ground, than to thrust himself forward, is the very man, provided he has the requisite qualifications in other respects, whom the mass of men are most willing to follow; whereas, he who is disposed to take the lead, whether it is conceded to him or not—who can never consent to be anything, unless he can be everything—will rarely carry the more considerate and well judging portion of the community along with him. I can think of several persons, at this moment, who have sunk into deep obscurity from the very effort to rise into too bright a light—men who might have been respected, and honoured, and even exalted to high places, had it not been that their insatiable love of power, their ambition to be the greatest, would not suffer them to wait for the honest judgment of society, or the slow movements of Providence.

I have adverted to the influence which this spirit exerts on society in general; let me say that it acts *most* disastrously on the well being of the Church. The Church is a community which has interests to manage and provide for that are peculiarly its own. It were not to be expected, considering the great variety of intellectual and moral constitution among men, as well as the different circumstances under which their characters are developed—it were not to be expected that there should be no diversity of opinion among either the

officers or the private members of the Church, in regard to the measures best adapted to promote its prosperity. In respect to everything fundamental, the Master has indeed spoken explicitly, so that there can be no apology for either disobedience or disagreement. But there are many matters of minor importance, in relation to which the teachings of Scripture are more general, and the wisdom of the Church is profitable to direct. And here there is abundant scope for the spirit of mutual forbearance and condescension. But alas! it is just at this point that the opposite spirit has most frequently and most fatally discovered itself. Diotrephes is the representative of a mighty host in the Church, whose inordinate desire of preferment has disturbed its peace, marred its purity, retarded its growth, and preyed upon its vital energies. Do what you can, I pray you, to discourage this spirit; and begin your efforts by bidding it depart from your own bosom.

LETTER XIV.

TO ONE OF A MANAGING AND DISINGENUOUS SPIRIT.

I AM not at all disposed to condemn the exercise of a due degree of caution, in the intercourse which the Christian has with society. Prudence is a virtue which he cannot dispense with, without jeoparding his comfort, his character, his usefulness. For want of this, some men, whose general good intentions and right feelings we cannot doubt, have seemed to pass through the world, leaving it a matter of question whether they had accomplished more of good or of evil. But the quality of which I am about to speak, though it may sometimes take the name of prudence, has really no affinity to anything which Christianity recognizes as a virtue. It is identical with worldly cunning. It loves darkness rather than light. It hesitates not to take an undue advantage, even of a Christian brother. It conceals daggers beneath smiles. It sometimes professes great frankness, and even glories in having no purposes which it is ashamed to avow; but in making such a proclamation, it is acting altogether in character—it is an effort to blind the eyes of men, in order that

it may work to better advantage for the accomplishment of its unworthy ends.

Without imputing to you this offensive quality in the highest degree, I am sure that I do you no injustice in saying that you cannot claim an exemption from it; and the result of my recent observations upon your conduct has been to satisfy me, that time is doing nothing to render your character more transparent. You will allow me, therefore, in all friendship, to expostulate with you in regard to this unfortunate propensity.

The evil to which I here refer is two-fold—it has respect to the end which you seek to accomplish, and to the means which you employ for accomplishing it. You scruple not to endeavour to subserve your own interest by injuring another; and need I say that this is a palpable contradiction to the spirit of the Gospel? It is seeking your own advantage, not only above that of another, but at the expense of that of another. It involves criminal injustice, as well as gross selfishness; both of which, Christianity, in its precepts and in its spirit, uniformly forbids. The religion which you profess, requires you to love your neighbour as yourself; to do evil to none, and to do good to all, as you have opportunity. If then you have attempted to injure your neighbour's property for the sake of increasing your own, or to wound his good name in the hope of

gathering some fresh laurels for yourself, or to further any of your designs at the expense of interfering with the just and praiseworthy designs of others, you may rest assured that Christianity loudly reproves you—it charges you with being false to the sacred obligations which you have assumed—if it does not pronounce your religion absolutely spurious, it stamps it at least with great imperfection and gross contradiction. Where this spirit is deliberately and habitually cherished, it furnishes conclusive evidence that you do not possess the spirit of Christ, and, of course, are none of his; and where it exists even as one of the remaining corruptions of the renewed nature, over which grace hath not yet completely triumphed, it is still an offence against the benevolent spirit of the Master you profess to serve, and may well lead you to doubt whether the hope which you are keeping alive in your bosom is not the hope of the hypocrite.

But it is not merely that your efforts contemplate an unworthy end, but they are themselves characterized by a spirit of disingenuousness. You have a purpose, but you do not avow it; or perhaps you have one purpose which occupies your thoughts night and day, while yet you seem to be aiming at another. You have your tools; which, though they breathe and speak, and seem to be operating with all due intelligence, still

move entirely at your bidding; and it is only a modified sort of moral agency that you allow to them. Possibly your purpose is gained, while the master mind that has conceived and executed it, has moved so silently, and in such deep darkness, that its agency has not even been suspected. Possibly the whole blame of the transaction is visited upon the poor instruments, though they knew little what they were doing until they were surprised by some strange result of their own efforts.

It not unfrequently happens that this spirit of unworthy management and worldly cunning manifests itself where there is no evil end to be accomplished; nay, it sometimes appears where the end is positively a good one. In some cases it seems to be nothing more than a simple love of management—a natural aversion to walking in an open, beaten track; and here it would seem to be more closely allied to vanity than anything else. I call to mind, at this moment, a man who was more remarkable than any other I ever knew, for moving in a mysterious way; he was acknowledged to possess great talents, but was never contented to perform even the most common actions in the same way with other people. Where the result to be produced was necessarily an ordinary affair, it was sure to be brought about by some extraordinary instrumentality. He was un-

doubtedly a person of great natural sagacity; but, unhappily, he had acquired, in the community in which he lived, a great reputation for worldly cunning. And the consequence was that he did everything at a disadvantage. If he had really wished to engage in any enterprise, without anything of management or finesse, the world would not have done justice to his intentions; he would still have had the reputation of working in his accustomed way, and not a few would have kept their eyes upon him to see if he was not aiming at something which he did not avow. Where a man of acknowledged frankness and integrity sets about any good object, there are multitudes who are ready to co-operate with him, and nobody thinks of questioning the sincerity of his aims; but let a man of great reputed cunning avow *his* intention of bringing something to pass, that may materially benefit the community, and few will be disposed to become his efficient auxiliaries, until they have looked on every side to see whether he may not be enlisting them, professedly for one purpose, but really for another.

Let me urge you to beware of this evil, as one that must essentially vitiate your character, both as a man and a Christian. Be prudent, indeed; but let not prudence, with you, ever degenerate into disingenuous concealment or unfair dealing. You are not always bound to tell the whole truth,

but you are never at liberty to practise deliberate deception. And where this disposition appears in a professor of religion, especially in connection with some unworthy selfish purpose, it is not easy to overrate the evil which it brings upon the cause of Christ. How often have I heard worldly men, speaking of such professors, congratulate themselves that, if they were not themselves religious, they were at least honest! Whatever there is amiss on this subject in your character, may God enable you to correct. See to it, that the ends at which you aim, and the means by which you seek to gain them, will both bear the light; and you will, through grace, meet the reward of such a course of conduct, both on earth and in heaven.

LETTER XV.

TO ONE OF AN IMPATIENT AND COMPLAINING SPIRIT.

It is quite likely that it has never occurred to you that you are liable to the charge which the subject of this letter would seem to imply. You do not pretend to deny that you are sometimes not perfectly satisfied with your lot, and you ask me, perhaps, to show you one, if I can, who never finds fault; but that you have more than your ordinary share of this infirmity, you are in no wise prepared to admit. Well, I have no wish to prove that yours is an extreme case; nor do I mean to say that I might not select many other individuals, to whom my remarks would apply with equal pertinence; but still I must insist that yours is a case of the kind that I have designated; and the fact that you share the evil in common with many others, is no reason why you should not have your attention seriously directed to it.

I will tell you candidly some of the ways in which I think your impatient and dissatisfied spirit discovers itself. I do not suppose that you ever allow yourself to think that you arraign In-

finite Wisdom, or question the propriety of any of God's dealings with you; but if you will notice particularly your own conduct, and scrutinize your feelings and motives, I think you will find it difficult to resist the conviction that many of your complaints terminate, not upon man, but upon God. I have heard you more than once express your disappointment, in not realizing a favourite plan, in terms that have evinced an almost angry dissatisfaction, when the disappointment had been entirely independent of any voluntary human agency. You expected to set out on a journey on a certain morning; and when the morning came, instead of leaving home, you were so ill as to be obliged to send for a physician. You took the disappointment so much to heart that your countenance looked almost like what we should imagine Cain's to have been, after he slew his brother. Your arrangements for the day rendered it desirable to you that the weather should be fine; but the rain came pouring in torrents; and you showed clearly enough by your actions, that it should not have been so, if the government of the world had been in your hands. I have heard you complain bitterly of your neighbours, so that one might have supposed your lot had been cast in Sodom; when, after all, it seemed to me that any one who lived among human beings would find as much to complain of as yourself.

You allow yourself to be unreasonably irritable in your own family, finding fault with whatever is not exactly according to your mind; insomuch that some of your guests have felt uneasy while sojourning under your roof. And I must not forget to say, that when you lost a child not long since, I could not discover, in anything that fell from you, the workings of a spirit of submission; —on the contrary, when I exhorted you to seek a refuge, in the hour of your calamity, in God's gracious covenant, you answered me by reflecting bitterly upon some individual, who induced you to a course to which you thought you could refer indirectly the child's illness and death. Now, it is upon such grounds as these that I am impelled to the conclusion that you have fallen into a habit of impatience that greatly needs to be corrected.

You cannot but see that the indulgence of this spirit is really nothing better than rebellion against God. For it is God who orders the circumstances of your earthly condition; and, in complaining of them, you virtually express your distrust of his wisdom and goodness. Many of the inconveniences and disappointments with which you find fault, are from the direct ordering of his providence, without the intervention of any other visible agency; and even where there are human instruments concerned, and culpably concerned,

still God's hand is to be acknowledged in this, as a part of that great and divinely arranged system, which will ultimately secure the greatest good to them who love him. You disobey, you rebel, as often as you complain. If it be admitted that you are a true Christian, just in proportion as you indulge this spirit, you not only fail to grow in grace, but you counteract God's merciful purposes towards you. He designs that these crosses should act as a salutary discipline upon your spirit; that they should inspire you with fresh confidence in his wisdom, and grace, and faithfulness, and render the prospect of heaven more dear to you, by giving you a foretaste of its joys in the midst of tribulation. If you pervert them to a different purpose, where are you to look for any evidences, on which you can rely, of growth in grace? Rather, what reason have you to believe that the principle of grace has ever been implanted in your heart?

If you have respect to your own personal comfort, you will crucify this unhallowed temper, and cultivate the opposite spirit of contentment and submission. So long as your present state of mind continues, you can never have anything like true inward peace. While you live in this world, you will always be subject to vicissitude and disappointment, and you will be the sport of every adverse wind that blows. Let your earthly

condition be what it may, you can never know anything like true independence ; whereas, if you cultivate a spirit of quiet submission to the divine will, the consequence will be an all-pervading and habitual, if not an uninterrupted, tranquillity. What has he to fear whose heart is stayed upon God ?

Then, again, this impatient spirit prevents you from enjoying the happiness which Providence intended should flow to you through your social relations. If you accustom yourself to find fault with your family, and friends, and neighbours, for everything they may say or do that does not entirely correspond with your wishes, it is impossible that they should take any comfort in your society, and they will very soon cause you to find it out. And this discovery will be a source of annoyance to you ; it will beget increased jealousy and mortification on your part, and this again will re-act to produce, on the part of others, increasing reserve, if not positive alienation. Thus you sacrifice, in a great measure, your social as well as your spiritual enjoyment. You make enemies out of friends. You fail to make friends where it is in your power, and check in many a bosom the warm current of benevolent feeling which would otherwise flow out towards you.

In professing to be a Christian, you virtually acknowledge your obligation to live in the habit-

ual exercise of a benevolent spirit, and to do what you can to promote the happiness and well-being of your fellow-men. But what becomes of this obligation, so long as you are continually finding fault with both God and man? In order to render those around you happy, there must be at least a degree of sunshine in your countenance; but, alas! it is a rare thing that the cloud of discontent is ever lifted from your brow. If you will make men happy, you must ordinarily come near to them; but who does not wish to have an everlasting fault-finder keep at a distance? Most of the good that men accomplish, is done in their social capacity; but so long as you complain of every thing, I do not know who would not rather do good by himself than to be associated with you. And even if you really try to make yourself, in some respects, useful, it seems to me that you have little right to expect the concurring favour of that Providence which you so often arraign, indirectly at least, on the charge of measuring out to you a hard lot.

Let me entreat you to lay this subject to heart, and endeavour to correct this unhappy trait in your religious and social character. Get your mind deeply imbued with a sense of God's overruling and directing providence, extending even to the numbering of hairs and the falling of sparrows; and accustom yourself to connect the

thought of perfect wisdom and goodness with even the most trying events. Dwell upon the example of Him whom you call Master and Lord; and mark the breathings of perfect submission and trust in God, when the great waters came over his soul. Think how much fewer afflictions and crosses you have than you deserve; and how few, too, in comparison with the number of your blessings. And recollect that the sufferings of the present are designed to increase the glory of the future; not merely through the power of contrast, but by forming the mind to a higher type of holiness, and infusing into it more of the spirit of heaven. Recollect, too, that the evils of which you are so prone to complain are of short continuance; and that if you endure them in a spirit of Christian patience, it will be but a little while before you will have the whole wilderness behind you, and will enter exultingly into that world, where not a thought shall miss its object, not a wish shall ever be disappointed.

LETTER XVI.

TO ONE OF AN INCONSTANT AND FICKLE SPIRIT.

You must allow me to tell you, in all frankness, that you have acquired a great reputation, in every circle in which you are known, for instability in religion. I do not hear your general sincerity questioned; but every body says, that you are as changeable as the wind. I will not, however, rest in any such indefinite charge; but, that you may know definitely what I mean, I will notice two or three distinct points, in respect to which your instability is especially manifest. And I promise to bring up nothing which I cannot testify to from actual observation, or which I have not been assured of by the most unexceptionable witnesses.

Let me say, then, that you have discovered great instability in your religious faith. I know you were brought up to a belief in the Assembly's Catechism; and I suppose you do not now profess any different system of doctrine from what that teaches; and yet you have sometimes spoken of it in a manner to render it at least doubtful whether you received or rejected it. I have heard

of your arguing for the doctrine of election, and of the perseverance of the saints; and I have heard of your saying that, if those doctrines are true, they are at least among the mysteries that had better be let alone. I have heard of your talking in favour of the theology of one school, and then in favour of the theology of an opposite school; and what you said in the two cases formed a flat contradiction. If I were to express an honest opinion in regard to the actual state of your mind, it would be, that it would be no easy matter for you to tell what you do believe—your mind is not accustomed to be stationary; you are of the number who never attain, at least never hold fast, to any thing fixed and definite.

I fear your religious experience is no better in this respect than your religious faith; for it seems to me little else than an alternation between formalism and fanaticism. I remember the time (and it is not many years since), when you turned your back on the public religious services you were accustomed to attend, for the sake of following one of the maddest fanatics that have cursed the Church. You seemed suddenly to awake out of a deep sleep, and pass into a state of religious delirium. Every thing in the ordinary observance of divine institutions seemed to you stale and insipid. You marvelled that the Church with which you were connected could show so little spiritual

life. You had no difficulty in finding your way to an irregular and boisterous prayer-meeting, even before the dawn of day. You even said that you believed the millennium was opening; and you seemed determined to join in the first song by which it should be ushered in. This, to my certain knowledge, is a faithful description of your experience less than ten years ago. But how has it been almost ever since? how is it at this hour? The weekly prayer-meetings are regularly kept up in your Church; but if you have any knowledge of the fact, it must be from report, and not from observation. The cause of Christ is just as important as ever; but if you manifest any interest in it, I have yet to learn in what way. I never hear you voluntarily allude to the subject of religion, and your most intimate friends assure me that my experience, in this respect, does not differ from theirs. In short, there is nothing visible in your conduct to distinguish you from any mere moral man of the world. Observe, I do not say that you are nothing more than this. I only say that this is all which at present you make manifest. If another tempest of fanaticism should sweep over the community, I should expect with great confidence, that your voice would be heard in its terrific swell; and even if a genuine revival of religion should come, I should not be surprised to hear you finding fault with the tardiness of the movements designed to sustain and advance it.

There is yet another point at which your vacillating spirit has manifested itself; I mean in the estimate which you have formed of different preachers. If all your testimony were to be admitted, I could prove that the same man was, in the course of the same year, the most sound and instructive, and the most frigid and uninteresting, preacher you ever heard. Indeed, I know of one instance in which you pronounced a directly opposite judgment, upon a respectable clergyman's public performances, within three weeks. I suppose it is chiefly in consequence of this habit of mind, that you have been a member of some four or five different churches. When I have heard your favourable opinion quoted in respect to some minister, I have heard it significantly asked how long you had known him.

You cannot but see that this fickle spirit, taking, as I fear it does in your case, the form of a habit, is fraught with most injurious consequences to you, in many respects. It certainly renders exceedingly dubious your claim to Christian character; for, besides implying positive disobedience to the divine commands, it leaves you, during a large part of the time, in a state of great spiritual insensibility; and even when you awake, your religious exercises, it is to be feared, are but very poorly conformed to the scriptural standard of Christian experience. A state of uncertainty

in regard to divine truth, is, or ought always to be, a state of perplexity; for no one has a right to be at ease, when he is in doubt as to what the word of God teaches. Your example is one from which no good can possibly be hoped; for, as it points different ways at different times, it could be set down as nothing better than a contradiction. You cut yourself off from many opportunities of doing good which you might otherwise enjoy; you are prevented access to many a field of benevolent effort to which you would otherwise be welcome; you forfeit the good opinion of both the Church and the world; and even they who give you the most credit for sincerity, are not willing to trust you.

There is one circumstance, it must be acknowledged, that forms some apology for you, while yet I fear it is not very auspicious of a reformation. It is that your fickleness is not confined to religion, but extends, in a degree at least, to other things; so that it is fair to infer that you were constituted with a full share of this infirmity. But even this need not, and ought not to discourage you. If we find a defect in our moral constitution, instead of taking for granted that it admits of no remedy, and acting accordingly, we are to set ourselves vigorously to work to find out and apply a remedy; nor are we to rest until the evil is thoroughly corrected. What you have to

do, is to form definite views of truth and duty; to become satisfied, on mature and devout inquiry, as to what you are required to believe, and what you are required to do; and then you are to ask grace of God to make you as firm as the hills to your honest convictions. Resolve that you will hold fast the faithful word, and always keep on the line of duty, without even inquiring what sacrifices, in the one case or the other, may be involved.

LETTER XVII.

TO ONE OF AN EXCLUSIVE AND BIGOTED SPIRIT.

I know of nothing more adverse to the spiritual prosperity, either of individuals or of the Church at large, than the want of a due appreciation of divine truth. And whenever the faith once delivered to the saints is assailed, it is the duty of the Church to contend for it, and to contend earnestly and manfully. There may be those who will call this bigotry and intolerance; but we must maintain the truth notwithstanding. This is the grand deposite which Christ has lodged with his Church; and if it be sacrificed—no matter from what consideration—there is a treasonable part acted somewhere towards Zion's King.

Nor will you understand me as objecting to the division of the Church into sects, or as pleading for a union of all into a common body, or as intimating that the difference between them is of little or no moment. I take no such ground as this. You are a member of a Presbyterian church, I doubt not, from conviction; and I advise you to hold fast to its doctrines and usages, and stand

ready to vindicate them, when you think that they are unreasonably assailed. In short, I would have you not only an honest, but earnest and consistent member of the communion to which you belong.

But pardon me for saying that I think I have observed in you some tendencies to something beyond true and sound Presbyterianism. I have noticed a disposition in you to arrogate to your own denomination, more at least than is modest, and to speak of other denominations in a tone of ungracious disparagement. It has seemed to me, sometimes, as if you have actually rejoiced when a false step has been made by some other sect, as if what was loss to them was gain to you. You seem to look upon them with undue distrust; and I remember once to have heard you speak of something praiseworthy that had been accomplished by a denomination which you yourself do not doubt is, in the main, evangelical, as good coming out of Nazareth. You gather yourself up into too small a space. Your Christian sympathies are not sufficiently diffusive to answer to the comprehensive and magnanimous spirit of Christianity. I wish to have you a good Presbyterian; but I wish to have you also, in the proper sense of the phrase, a truly catholic Christian.

It is to be expected—and is certainly proper—that your religious associations should be prima-

rily and chiefly with the members of your own communion; and more than that—it seems now to be generally admitted that each sect labours for the common cause more efficiently in an individual than in an associate capacity; that is, that there is less chance for interference, and better opportunity for efficient co-operation, where the members of each denomination work together, than where there is an attempt to merge all in a community of feeling and effort. But though it be admitted that this is the right doctrine on this subject, it still remains true that there is among all the different evangelical denominations, abundant scope for the exercise of an enlarged Christian charity. This virtue may be considered as taking a negative form, when it operates to prevent a spirit of misrepresentation or detraction, and all attempts, direct and indirect, to lessen the prosperity or impair the influence of other denominations. But we must not be satisfied with merely letting them alone; we must recognize them, so far as they hold the faith, and manifest the spirit, of the Gospel, as disciples of a common Master, and heirs of a common salvation, with ourselves. We must be ready, as occasion or opportunity occurs, to extend to them the various offices of Christian kindness and good will; letting them see that we consider the great points which we hold in common, as Christians, as far

more important than those in which we differ, as Christian sects. And there is much common ground on which they and we may meet for the promotion of the common cause of truth and righteousness; and it is fitting that this co-operation should be just as extensive, as may consist with mutual good will, and the highest efficiency of all concerned. So far as Christians are of one mind, it is vastly important that they should walk together; but where their views are materially different, even though the difference be not fundamental, it is better that they should not attempt to force anything like external union. But they may show that they are governed by the law of kindness, even in agreeing to differ. They may rejoice in each other's joy, and, in a sense, bear each other's burdens, and be fellow-helpers unto the kingdom of God, while yet they recognize different denominational standards, and regard each other, of course, as holding the truth in considerable imperfection.

As an antidote to this narrow, and, in the worst sense, sectarian spirit, let me remind you that it is utterly at war with the genius of the Gospel, which reveals the mercy of God towards his erring creatures, in the universal offer of a free salvation. The example of the Lord Jesus Christ, as well as the spirit of Paul and the Apostles, comes to us with the force of a command, incul-

cating the duty of an expansive good-will towards all who love the truth, and walk according to its dictates. If you stand aloof from your brethren, because they may not yet have attained to the same things with yourself, or because, from education or other circumstances, they are thrown within the pale of a different communion from you, you certainly violate the charity of the Gospel—you do them great injustice, in not extending to them your Christian sympathy and affection, and you close against yourself one important source of religious improvement and enjoyment.

But there is yet another consideration, which ought to put you on your guard against the indulgence of this spirit—it is the bad influence which you hereby exert upon the world. Where different denominations, professedly holding the same head, are seen to regard each other with mutual jealousy and dislike, ready to blaze abroad each other's imperfections and errors, instead of being disposed to hide them from the public eye, and weep over them in secret places, you cannot fully estimate the injury which is hereby done to those who are willing to find an apology in anything for the neglect of their own salvation. Even when we enter the lists of controversy, at the manifest call of Providence, and in defence of important truth, such is the weakness of our nature, that there is always danger that our zeal

for truth may degenerate into party spirit, and that the world will point to us as poor examples of that charity which forms one of the crowning attributes of Christian character. I say, again, I would have you earnest, even valiant, for the truth; but I would caution you against an undue tenacity about matters of small moment; and I would have you remember, even where you consider the error a serious one, that you are still to treat the errorist as a man, and let kindness have its perfect work in endeavouring to win him to the truth.

LETTER XVIII.

TO ONE WHO IS NEGLECTFUL OF THE COMMON COURTESIES OF LIFE.

THE subject on which I am about to address you, does not, I acknowledge, necessarily involve any moral delinquency; and yet it has an important bearing upon your Christian character and usefulness. You must bear with me, when I tell you, that your deficiency here is so marked that it escapes the observation of nobody. Even those who are themselves far from what could be desired in this respect, not only take refuge behind your example, but acknowledge that your example would justify much more than they should be willing to practise.

Do not think, however, that I have any wish to see you turned into a dandy, or becoming a slave to etiquette, or trying to work yourself into conformity to all the burdensome and unmeaning requirements of modern society. You may be all that I wish, without ever being trained at a dancing-school, or brought in contact with what is technically called the world of fashion. What I have to exhort you to, is quite as much a negative

as a positive quality; I mean it consists in avoiding the wrong, as truly as in practising the right. You are accustomed, for instance, to indulge yourself, even in refined society, in lounging and awkward postures, as if you had forgotten that you were not reposing in absolute solitude. You approach two persons who are engaged in conversation, and you thrust in a remark which is in no wise called for, with a view to give the conversation a different turn, or, as the case may be, to direct attention to yourself. You answer a respectful question, that is asked you, in a rude and indecent manner, as if the question itself had taken the form of an insult. You even use the *weed* in a lady's parlour, and after you are gone, the carpet bears witness that you had gone neither to the window nor to the door while the disgusting process was going on. Some person asks your influence in his behalf when you are in a hurry, and, instead of decently excusing yourself, for want of time, you make some offensive and severe remark that leaves a sting behind, which is, perhaps, never extracted. In short, you act out, continually, a rough and uncultivated nature. You take counsel of nothing beyond the feeling or the convenience of the moment. Nobody doubts that you have mind enough, and, perhaps, heart enough; but in manners you are sadly, culpably deficient.

Now it cannot be disguised that this neglect of common civilities has become so much a matter of habit with you, that there is little prospect of its yielding to any other than a course of vigorous and continued effort. If you imagine that the evil will gradually correct itself, without any particular exertion on your part, you greatly mistake; it will only become more inveterate and more hopeless. You must feel that it is a matter of real moment, and you must bring a strong resolution to bear upon, and must persevere in, your efforts till your friends, who deal with you most honestly, shall tell you that nothing of it remains. What lies at the foundation of all good manners, is truly benevolent feelings—a disposition to promote the happiness of those around you; and if you possess this disposition, and act habitually under its influence, what you have to do beside, in order to gain the object, is comparatively little. If you will bear in mind the golden rule of doing to others as you would that they should do to you, it will help you greatly in this matter; for it is impossible that any one should desire to have the ordinary courtesies of life dispensed with, in the treatment which he receives from others. Carry out this principle into all the details of social life—let it influence you in all that you do and all that you say—and you will be surprised to find what a change this, of

itself, will have wrought in your social character. It will cause you not only to avoid everything positively offensive, but to cultivate whatever is lovely and of good report. You must accustom yourself to pay due attention to little things. It is of these that life is, in a great degree, made up; and if you adopt the principle, in your social intercourse, of attending to the greater matters, and leaving the lesser ones to take care of themselves, you will find that everything will go wrong; you will make enemies instead of friends, and bring upon yourself reproach instead of securing favour. It is wonderful how much good or evil you may do for yourself, or for others, by a single word—even the *manner* in which you utter an expression may be the means of gaining or losing a friend.

Let me say that this is a matter that has far more to do with your usefulness than you are aware of. There is a large portion of society from which a habit of vulgarity and coarseness will do much to exclude you; and I am constrained to tell you, that I consider it as owing to this that your usefulness hitherto has been so circumscribed. There are, indeed, some minds of such extraordinary capacity, that they can overleap this barrier, and make themselves felt in spite of even the most offensive external demonstrations; but you may rest assured that even

they do not accomplish all the good which they might, if they cultivated a bland and unexceptionable manner. Even those who admire them most, and over whom they exert the most controlling influence, are often heard to say that it is a pity that, so far as their manners are concerned, they had not been cast in a different mould.

I wish to urge this subject upon you not merely as a matter of social propriety, but chiefly as a matter of Christian duty. You are bound, as a disciple of Christ, to accomplish all the good you can; and in order to this, it is absolutely necessary, not only that you should cultivate good and generous dispositions, but that the various little proprieties of life should be duly attended to. Has it never occurred to you, moreover, that, in just so far as you are lacking in this respect, you fail to carry out the true spirit of the Gospel; for it is not more certain that Christianity reveals the doctrine of salvation, or inculcates a perfect morality, than that it teaches indirectly a system of the highest politeness; for though it gives no formal code of rules on this subject, it enjoins and creates principles of action that legitimately operate to produce such a result. It is not too much to say, that for the highest degree of genuine refinement, we are indebted to the same fountain of blessing from which we derive our religious consolations and our immortal hopes.

Since I began to write this letter, I have thought of two individuals, both eminent clergymen, one among the living, and one among the dead, as among the most striking examples I have known —the one of the offensive quality, which I wish you to lay aside ; the other of the excellent quality, which I wish you to possess. The former is acknowledged on all hands to possess an intellect of a very high order; he has a much more than ordinary control of other minds, and I am not aware that any body questions the genuineness— I may say the elevation—of his Christian character. But there is nothing winning or agreeable in his exterior. He shows a perfect contempt for all the usages of refined society. You cannot place him in any circumstances that prove embarrassing to him; for he cares so little for social forms, that it costs him not the least sacrifice to go directly in the face of them. You may make a request of him, with which it would cost him little or no pains to comply, and he brings out a hard and ungracious refusal. Even when he means to say a kind thing, or perform a benevolent action, his manner is so repulsive as to make you almost wish that he had not spoken or acted. He sometimes shows himself a giant in the pulpit, but every body says that he is a boor out of it. But it is delightful to turn to the other example, though it makes me sad to think that it is among

the bright examples that have passed away, except as memory and gratitude have embalmed them. The venerable man to whom I now refer, had the advantage of the most amiable natural dispositions, and of the most delicate perceptions of the fitting and beautiful in human conduct. He had cultivated this part of his nature with the utmost care. It was manifest to all who saw him, that all his social conduct was shaped by rule; instead of refusing anything which another had a right to require, his benevolence would always allow more than justice could demand. In whatever situation he was placed, you always felt that his bearing was at once manly and dignified, gentle and urbane. No man was more considerate than he of the feelings of others; and there was nothing but duty that he would not sacrifice to avoid wounding them. He did nothing that could reasonably offend; he neglected nothing that could properly contribute to the enjoyment of those around him. More than one generation must pass away, before he will be forgotten as a model of a Christian gentleman. I think I hear you ask, Who else could this be than Dr. MILLER?*

* The late Rev. Samuel Miller, D. D. of Princeton, author of "Letters on Clerical Manners and Habits," published by the Board of Publication.—EDITOR.

LETTER XIX.

TO ONE WHO IS LACKING IN REVERENCE FOR THE TRUTH AS A MORAL VIRTUE.

As you may possibly infer from the subject of my letter, that I suppose you capable of deliberately and intentionally violating the truth, I wish to begin what I have to say by utterly disavowing such an idea. I doubt not that the obligation of every one to speak the truth, makes part of your creed as truly as it does of mine. And I am fully persuaded that you do not mean to allow yourself in what you consider an infringement of this great law of God and man that binds society together. But I am obliged to add that I am equally convinced that there are at least two points, in relation to this general subject, at which you are extremely vulnerable. I propose to direct your attention a little, in all frankness, to each of them.

The first is an unfortunate habit you have acquired of making exaggerated statements. You have a lively imagination, and to embellish a little never costs you any trouble; and besides, you seem to consider the sober truth as tame and

lacking in interest; you want something more exciting—better fitted to arrest the attention and stir up the feelings. If it is something humorous that you are relating, you seem disposed to create a louder laugh than you would otherwise secure, by throwing every circumstance into the most ludicrous light you can. If it is something of a gloomy and appalling character, you task your imagination for yet darker shades than the fact supplies, in order to work up a picture that shall tell most powerfully upon the sensibilities of those who listen to you. If it is a mere ordinary occurrence, you still show your wish to make it extraordinary, by either magnifying it into quite another thing, or else connecting with it something to which it is at best but remotely related. I tell you candidly, that I have heard you tell stories, by which I acknowledge I could not help being amused, but which were so entirely overcoloured, that I could scarcely recognize the facts of which they purported to be a faithful narrative. Once in particular, I remember your figuring in this way in the presence of a large company; and though you professed to be telling the truth, yet your imagination so perfectly led you captive, that I could not but think that there was about as much difference between your statement and the veritable fact, as there was between that of a man's having vomited three black crows, and

that of his having vomited something as black as a crow.

The evils which result from this habit, you may rest assured, are neither few nor small. The fact that you should have formed such a habit, shows a pre-existing state of mind that is far from being in harmony with the divine requirements. It evinces a loose way of thinking and feeling, in regard to the obligation to strict veracity; and the habit itself is really nothing else than a habit of voluntary misrepresentation. You may take the comfort of thinking that you mean no harm, and that those who listen to you will not be likely to be misled, as they will make due allowance for your passion for telling a good story; but even if this be so, it does not prevent your doing a great injury to yourself. If you accustom yourself to relate apocryphal stories as verities, merely for amusement, or to exaggerate the truth till it loses its character as truth, you need not marvel, if that which begins in the want of due reverence for the truth, should issue in an utter disregard to it; and if, from this unfortunate training which you are giving yourself, you should, by and by, find yourself capable of serving a purpose by deliberate and downright falsehood.

Let me say, too, that this habit to which I refer is altogether unprofitable. It does not secure the end at which it aims. Your tendency to ex-

aggeration soon becomes known, and your statements are all received with due allowance; and besides, where you have occasion to relate a really remarkable thing, you do it at a great disadvantage, as your whole vocabulary of superlatives is exhausted upon ordinary matters. So far as your example goes, I need not say that it is evil. The circumstance of your being a professor of religion will give it more authority in the view of some, while it will lead others to make religion itself the object of reproach.

I would advise you, then, as you value either your Christian character or Christian influence, to take heed that your representations on all subjects are in strict conformity to truth. Better fall below, than go beyond the line, in any statements you may have occasion to make. The habit which you have formed will yield to nothing short of the most vigilant care and persevering effort. But to be free from it were worth more than all the care and effort which it would cost you.

The other point to which I wish to refer, is the uncommon facility which you have in making promises, and the equal facility with which you seem to forget or overlook them. Here again, I am far from charging you with an intention to falsify, and yet you cannot wonder that the frequent recurrence of such cases, causes your good to be

sometimes evil spoken of. It has seemed to me that you act habitually from a wish to make everybody as happy as you can for the moment; and hence, you readily make promises without thinking that there are any difficulties in the way of their fulfilment; and when those difficulties present themselves, you seem to feel absolved from all obligation to keep your word. The old maxim, that circumstances alter cases, comes up as a salvo to your conscience; but the person to whom you have made the promise admits no such apology, and, in his estimation, you stand charged with a culpable delinquency. If I mistake not, you frequently fail to keep your engagements from mere forgetfulness; indeed, it would seem, sometimes, that your promises were made only to be forgotten, or disregarded.

This must be considered a greater evil than the one to which I previously referred; inasmuch as it not only involves a still worse form of moral delinquency, but it implies a willingness, if not a disposition, to trifle with the interests of others. You cannot habitually or frequently fail to fulfil your promises, even on the ground of mere carelessness, but that your name will become a reproach. They whom you have needlessly disappointed will withdraw from you their confidence, and will manifest it by never putting themselves in the way of being disappointed by you again.

And they will relate the history of their experience to others, and before you are aware of it, your reputation for integrity, both in the Church and in the world, will be in the dust. I will not undertake to say to what extent this sad result has already been realized, respecting you; but I should be unfaithful to my convictions, not to say that you have gone to a point that has, at least, greatly diminished your Christian influence.

I knew an individual, many years ago, whose history furnished one of the saddest illustrations of trifling with one's own word, that I have ever happened to observe. He was a man of commanding talents, of excellent education, of amiable disposition, and of the most bland and persuasive address. He was, withal, a professor of religion, and an office-bearer in the Church. At the commencement of his career, no man gave higher promise than he of Christian respectability and usefulness; but, unhappily, he fell into the habit of unscrupulously making promises, which he did not and could not fulfil. His friends early admonished him in relation to it, but they might as well have spoken to the wind. He would promise, indeed, to heed their admonitions; but this like most of his other promises, seemed never to be thought of after it was made. He became, at length, extensively known for his false dealing; and, by common consent, he lost his standing,

both as a citizen and a Christian. He had many fine, generous feelings; but between him and the truth there seemed to be no affinity. I never believed that he uttered deliberate and studied falsehoods; and yet those who suffered and writhed under his broken promises held a less indulgent opinion concerning him. It is far from being a new-made grave that he occupies; but there are many, whose associations with it are still painful and revolting. When I think from what and to what he fell, I am the more earnest in entreating you to avoid not only the reality, but even the appearance of this evil.

LETTER XX.

TO ONE WHO IS DEFICIENT IN PARENTAL VIGILANCE AND CONTROL.

PERHAPS there is no subject on which reproof is generally less welcome than the neglect of parental duty. In most instances in which I have known of its being attempted, it has been met with an indignant denial of the alleged facts, and an expression of perfect confidence in the good intentions and exemplary conduct of the accused or suspected children. I have often marvelled to observe the blinding power of parental affection over individuals, whose judgment on almost any other subject I should accept without a moment's hesitation, and who withal, I could not doubt, intended in all things to keep a conscience void of offence. These persons have sometimes had even a sharp eye to see the faults of other children; while yet those of their own children, though they have been much greater, have seemed too inconsiderable to deserve reprehension. I have myself, from an imperious sense of duty, gone to a father, and a Christian father too, and laid before him proof of the absolute villainy of his child, that to any impartial person would have been entirely

irresistible, and have been met with the cool reply, that he had never known his son guilty of any such conduct, and he supected I had been misinformed.

Now, I am not sure but that, in addressing you on this subject, I shall have to encounter the same feeling as in the case to which I have referred; but even if this should be so, I can find no apology in it for the neglect of a plain duty. That your children are sadly neglected, and that the consequence of that neglect is abundantly manifest in the characters which they are forming, nobody, I believe, who has the opportunity of observing their conduct, pretends to doubt. They are rude and boisterous, as they walk the streets; insomuch that they attract the attention even of strangers. I have heard of their being disrespectful to old men; and instead of bowing down before the hoary head, they have made it an object of ridicule and contempt. They show little respect for your authority, and not unfrequently go directly in the face of your commands. I understand that they are rarely present at your family devotions, and that they have been heard to speak of the subject of prayer in general, with a revolting levity. They are sadly wanting in reverence for all sacred things, and they do not scruple even to use the name of the Supreme Being to give expression to their anger, or to give

point to a jest. I venture to say that there is not an individual who witnesses their daily conduct, but feels that it would be a merciful deliverance to the neighbourhood to have them removed from it.

Now it happens that these children are as yet only growing up, and are bound, in the strictest sense, to be subject to your authority. It is evident that your neglect to counsel and admonish, and restrain them, has contributed largely to make them what they are; and whatever difficulty you may now experience in making them what they *should be*, you must charge chiefly upon yourself. But let the point of disregard to your wishes, or rebellion against your authority, which they have reached, be what it may, you have no right to treat the case as if it were hopeless. You have neglected your duty to them, and they have violated their obligations to you—how know you, but that if you begin to discharge faithfully your *parental* duties, they may soon be seen taking up with alacrity their *filial* duties? and thus, to your great joy, you may find them transformed into docile, grateful, and obedient children. But suppose they should be deaf to your counsels, and resist your efforts, still you must persevere in doing your utmost for their reformation. Some of them surely must still be within your control—if they are inclined to disregard the voice of counsel and warning, you can make them feel the force of

parental authority in some more decided way; and you have the utmost reason to hope that they may be effectually recovered from the incipient stages of vice. You have indeed a much more difficult duty to perform, to bring them right, than you would have had to keep them right; but since you have actually erred, you must endeavour to correct your error in the best way you can. If you are faithful from this time, who can tell but that you may be privileged to present even these youthful wanderers before the throne, and say, "Here, Lord, am I, and the children whom thou hast given me."

Need I advert to the grounds of your obligation to awake to a faithful discharge of parental duty? Is it not a duty that you owe to your children? You have been instrumental of introducing them into a world of temptations and dangers, and will you do nothing to keep them amidst so great exposure, to fortify them against such a mighty amount of evil? It is through you that they have been launched on the ocean of a boundless existence, and is it a matter of no concern to you whether they are to inherit an immortality of glory or an immortality of woe? Can you look upon them as they are contracting habits in which lurk the seeds of endless misery, and reflect that they are bone of your bone, and flesh of your flesh, and yet leave them to press onward, un-

restrained and unwarned in the downward road? And are you willing thus to turn them out as the scourges of society—to inflict incalculable evils upon their generation, and to give just occasion to multitudes to regret that these wayward and profligate children had ever a place among the living?

But the aspect in which I wish you to look at this subject more particularly is this: you are a professed disciple of Christ; these very children you have dedicated to God in baptism, promising to train them up in the way of his commandments; but in thus neglecting them, you show an utter disregard to the baptismal vow, and a culpable willingness to fail of doing good where you have the very best opportunity. The Church witness the wanderings of your children, and they say, "Surely, if the covenant had not been broken in their neglected education, such demonstrations of filial disobedience and youthful irreligion would not have been so uniformly or so extensively witnessed." The world, too, behold it all; they compare the characters of your children with those of the children of many who have never made a Christian profession; they compare the training which yours have had with the training which others have had, over whom the form of baptism has never been pronounced; and they sneeringly ask, what advantage has the child of a believer over the child of an unbeliever; nay,

of what value is that religion which permits its professor to leave his children to their own way, even though it be, by his own confession, the broad way to ruin! It is my earnest prayer that you may be enabled to correct the error into which you have fallen, in regard to parental discipline, and be permitted still to see your children walking in the love and fear of God.

LETTER XXI.

TO A MOTHER WHO NEGLECTS TO BRING HER CHILDREN FOR BAPTISM.

ALLOW me to say, at the outset, that I am not about to reason with you as a Baptist. It would be a poor compliment not only to your consistency, but even to your Christian integrity, that I should do so; for though the Baptists are a worthy and highly respectable denomination, and hold all the leading truths of the Gospel in substantial purity, yet on the subject of baptism they have views which other Christian denominations, and among them that to which you belong, do not endorse. The fact, therefore, that you are one of a denomination that not only practises infant baptism, but in its formularies recognizes it as a bounden duty, and especially the fact that you made no objection to this feature in the economy of the Church, when you became a member, and that you do not profess that your views have undergone any change since that time—these facts, I say, oblige us to look for some other reason for your delinquency on this subject, than is found in the supposition of your either having never held,

or having abjured the doctrine in question. Indeed, I have been informed, upon good authority, that it is not the *truth* of the doctrine, but its *importance*, concerning which you doubt; that though you do not deny that the practice may have some foundation in Scripture, yet you regard it as one of those lesser matters which may very well be left somewhat to one's inclination and circumstances. I feel assured that you have fallen into a grievous mistake on this subject, and I cannot but hope that I shall be successful in the effort I am about to make to convince you of it.

Let me ask you, then, in the first place, whether you are not chargeable with a palpable contradiction in admitting that the Bible really contains a warrant for infant baptism, and yet refusing to comply with the scriptural requisition on the ground that little importance is to be attached to it. Is it not presumptuous to say that *anything* that God has required of us, is unimportant? Be it so that we cannot see the reasonableness of his command any more than Abraham could, when the voice from Heaven bade him sacrifice his son; yet if the point, that God has actually spoken, be settled, we are as truly bound to obey as Abraham was—as truly as if there was nothing mysterious in the requisition. If you say that you have not examined the subject sufficiently to have reached a very intelligent and fixed judgment in

respect to it, and that it is not much more than an hereditary assent that you render to this doctrine of your Church, then I must tell you plainly that it is high time you should *know* why you belong to one denomination rather than another; and that it is with an ill grace that you take refuge in voluntary ignorance or uncertainty against the acknowledged claims of your Christian profession.

But, if I mistake not, a little reflection will show you that there is far greater importance attached to this ordinance than you attribute to it, and that the course you are pursuing involves deep injustice to your children, to yourself, and to the Church.

The promise of the covenant that God made with Abraham, was, "I will be a God to thee and to thy seed." Our doctrine is that that covenant was but an earlier development of the Christian covenant; and though the rite of initiation into the visible Church is changed under the present economy, yet the promise remains in all its strength and fulness. God has promised, then, to be the God, in some peculiar sense, of the seed of believers, bearing the seal of the covenant; and is it not reasonable to suppose that if they die in infancy, they will die to reign with Christ? I believe, indeed, with great confidence, that *all* who die in this period are subjects of the regene-

rating influences of divine grace, and go safely to heaven ; but I cannot but think that Christian parents, who dedicate their children to God, and offer up believing prayers in their behalf, while they are incapable of praying for themselves, have *peculiar* reason, on this ground, to be comforted in their early departure. They need have no doubt that the little lambs, which the great Shepherd leaves in their keeping, only long enough to have the baptismal water sprinkled upon them, and the prayer of faith offered over them, are gathered into the higher fold ; and that thus they become instrumental of heightening the joy, as well as adding to the number, of Heaven's inhabitants. But suppose they attain to moral agency, what are the blessings which the promise secures to them ? Nothing less, certainly, than the enjoyment of the external means of religion, including especially the prayers and the fostering care of the Church, with the accompanying influences of the Holy Spirit. Thus God expressly promises to Jacob, his servant, and to Israel, whom he had chosen, " I will pour my Spirit on thy seed, and my blessing on thine offspring ; and they shall spring up as among the grass, and as willows by the water-courses."

But is there no reason to believe that the fact that a child has been dedicated to God in baptism, will act directly and powerfully upon his

own feelings in favour of a religious life, as he advances towards maturity? Will it be easy for him to divest himself of the impression that, in pursuing a sinful course, even in living in the neglect of religion, he offends against some peculiar obligations? Have his parents solemnly dedicated him to God—the Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, and covenanted not only for themselves to educate him in the fear of God, but, so far as they could, for *him* also, that he should walk in the way of God's commandments; and has this covenant been ratified by a thousand prayers and other tokens of parental love; and do you believe that the recollection of all this would have no effect upon the heart of the child, so long as the spirit of filial gratitude and sensibility was not entirely dislodged from it? I doubt not that this reflection has come home like a death chill to many a child who has wandered far away from the path of duty and of life, and has sometimes been the means of reclaiming him to virtuous habits, and even leading him to true repentance; and I have as little doubt that the same consideration has nerved many a young heart to stand erect against the solicitations of the tempter, which otherwise might have formed a league with him, the end of which would have been death. I appeal, then, to the strength of parental love, when I ask, Are you willing to

withhold from your child that which, in its direct influence on his own mind, is so well fitted to keep him out of the forbidden way, and form him to usefulness, happiness, and heaven?

You tell me that my doctrine is contradicted by your observation; that you do not see that baptized children grow up any better than others; that they are as often found living in the neglect of religion, and even sinning with a high hand, as those in respect to whom this rite has never been performed. I am quite sure that if you calmly review this judgment, and the facts upon which it is based, you will have occasion to reverse it; for I do not believe but that, in any community where infant baptism is administered on scriptural principles, you will find a far greater amount of virtue and piety among those who have been the subjects of it, than those who have not. But we do not claim that baptism in itself is any certain security for a virtuous character: not only may the child, by the voluntary indulgence of evil dispositions, prevent the good effect it is designed to produce, but the parents also, by their neglect of the obligations which it involves, may utterly forfeit all promised blessings, and even change it to a solemn farce. But surely the fact that an ordinance may be perverted from its legitimate significance and tendency, makes nothing against the ordinance itself; and it is a

poor argument for neglecting faithfully to do your whole duty, that those who perform only a part, and that in the letter, and not the spirit, do not receive the blessing promised to the faithful.

And if this is a duty that you owe to your children, not less is it a duty that you owe to yourself. If you are a Christian mother, your strongest wish in respect to your children, is that they may be virtuous, useful, and happy here, and prepared for the blessings of an endless life hereafter. You know that the forming of their character and destiny depends, under God, more on parental influence—yes, I may say, on a mother's influence, than any other. If, then, you desire to do your duty towards them, how natural is it that you should wish to fortify yourself, as far as possible, against all temptations to neglect it; to surround yourself with all the auxiliaries you can command for the faithful discharge of it. And if anything can answer these purposes, surely it must be the reflection that you have pledged yourself, formally and solemnly in the baptismal vow, to train them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. What better fitted than this to quicken your sense of parental responsibility, and make you earnest in your prayers, and firm, vigilant, and untiring in your efforts for their sanctification and salvation?

And I must add that, in the course you are

pursuing, you fail to fulfil the solemn covenant into which you have entered with the Church. When you became a member, you engaged to walk with those with whom you were thereby associated, in the observance of Christ's ordinances; but do you not fail in respect to one, according to their, and even your own, understanding of it? Is this fitted to encourage and strengthen the hearts of your brethern and sisters? Or is it not rather fitted to wound and depress them? Is it not likely that others will be induced to imitate your example? Would even *you* be willing, in your moments of reflection, to see the baptism of infants discontinued? If not, then avoid, I pray you, doing anything that tends to such a result. Let not your lips utter one thing, and your conduct another.

I must not omit to say, in concluding this letter, that I have heard it intimated that your delinquency in this respect is probably attributable, in some degree, to the fact that your husband is not a professor of religion, and that he objects to standing up with you when the ordinance is administered. But he does not object to your bringing the child yourself; and as this is nothing but what thousands of mothers do continually, so there is nothing in it at which the most delicate sense of propriety need even to pause. And can you—I will venture to say, dare you—

make your obedience or neglect of a command of God, turn on such a point as this? And what, think you, will be likely to be the influence on your husband, in the one case or the other? He knows that it is involved in the covenant into which you have entered, that you should dedicate your children to God; and will his views of religion be more elevated or depressed, if he sees you faithful or recreant to your covenant vows? Will it give him a high idea of the strength of your religious principles, that you should turn your back upon an acknowledged duty, because he is too proud to become associated in it, and you are too modest to attempt it alone?

I leave the subject with your maternal sensibilities, and your enlightened, conscientious convictions. May your views and conduct in relation to it be such as will stand the test of that hour when the earthly tie that binds you to your children shall be dissolved.

LETTER XXII.

TO A LADY WHO SENDS HER DAUGHTER TO A ROMAN CATHOLIC SCHOOL.

I TAKE for granted you need not be told that it is a matter of surprise and regret with many of your Christian friends, that you should have sent your daughter to be educated under the instruction of Roman Catholics. Indeed I have heard that you have already been spoken to, and even expostulated with, on the subject, and that you have regarded the anxiety which your friends have expressed as quite unnecessary, if not impertinent and intrusive. But notwithstanding this, my own convictions that you are placing your child in circumstances of imminent jeopardy, are too strong to allow me to remain silent, even though I had more reason than I have, to believe that my motives in addressing you, would not be fully appreciated. You will allow me to speak plainly and without restraint; and all that I ask of you is that you will, as a Christian mother, allow to the few considerations that I shall offer, the weight to which an enlightened and impartial judgment shall pronounce them entitled.

The only reason that I have heard for your taking this step is, that you believe that the school at which you have placed your daughter furnishes better advantages for improvement, especially in the more refined branches of female education, than any Protestant school within your reach. Herein, let me say, I am convinced that you are in a mistake. You are not shut up to the necessity of sending to any one Protestant school; but you have your choice of several, all of which are in good repute; and among them I am sure you can find at least one, whose teachers are fully as accomplished and capable as those to whose care your daughter has been committed. I am aware that the Romish schools claim to be superior, in respect to both the accomplishments of their teachers, and the order with which they are conducted; but as I can see no reason why this *should* be so, so I have never had the evidence that it *is* so; nor do I believe it.

But admitting that this were actually the case—that the best schools in the community in which you live, so far especially as respects the more graceful part of an education, were under the direction of Roman Catholics—still you cannot deny that there are several excellent Protestant schools around you—schools which are patronized by parents who hold the highest position in society, and are most careful in respect to the train-

ing of their daughters. You cannot, then, plead the alternative of placing your daughter at a Romish school, or of denying to her the advantages of a good education. You have more than one Protestant school almost at your door, in which her mind and manners would be duly cared for, and she would find herself associated with young ladies of the highest respectability.

I am, however, prepared to go still further, and say that if not only the advantages offered by a Roman Catholic school, were decidedly and greatly superior to those of any kindred Protestant institution in your neighbourhood, but the Protestant schools were really of a somewhat inferior order, you would still commit a great error in placing your child under Catholic instruction. The error is that you run the hazard of a great evil for the sake of what you must yourself acknowledge to be a lesser good. That is, for the sake of securing to your daughter the highest mental or worldly accomplishments, you suffer her to be surrounded with influences which are fitted to give her an aversion to the simplicity of the Gospel, and lead her to repose in a system whose theory is darkness, and whose practice is intolerance and crime.

But you tell me that you do not send your daughter to school to learn religion of one kind or another. Your sole object is to cultivate her

mind and manners; and as for her religious principles, what you omit to do yourself, you can safely leave to the weekly influences of the pulpit and the Sabbath-school. I cannot agree with you that the end of female education is likely to be accomplished, where there is no religious influence exerted; or that a Christian mother has reason to feel satisfied, if her daughter never hears a word in school that looks towards accountableness or immortality, provided only her intellectual faculties are skilfully dealt with, or her manners formed after a graceful model; but I maintain that even this is more than you have a right to expect. I venture to say you will find in nearly every school taught by Roman Catholics something that gives it a distinctive character. Romanism is there as the presiding genius; it is there perhaps in so insidious a form as scarcely to be detected; it is there, not with its implements of torture and death, but looking as bright and smiling and peaceful as an angel. The first effect likely to be produced on the mind of your daughter is a conviction that the Romish system is not understood by Protestants, or at least is greatly misrepresented by them; and soon she is brought to feel that the Catholics are a persecuted sect—the more she knows of them, the better she likes them; and at length she reaches a point where she can receive without scruple the most absurd

and revolting of their dogmas. I speak on this painful subject with confidence, because I have facts innumerable to sustain me in what I say. I have in my mind at this moment a young lady, (and she stands as the representative of a host,) whose experience has been almost precisely what I have just detailed. Her parents sent her to a Romish school from a conviction that there was a higher order of culture there than was elsewhere to be found. She had a naturally impressible mind—a mind that was susceptible of a sort of sombre enthusiasm, and that easily took the hue of objects by which she was surrounded. For more than a year she was separated from her parents, and they thought of nothing concerning her, but that she was making rapid progress in her education. At length she went home on a visit; and when the Sabbath morning came, and the family were about to go to church, it was observed that she was making no preparation to accompany them. When her mother inquired the reason, out came the astounding fact that she was a Catholic. Both her parents deplored it deeply; but it was too late; she had had her Catholic training, and the spirit that was in her was not to be dislodged even by parental expostulations and tears. If she is still living, I believe she has her home in a nunnery. She had several younger

sisters; but none for whom the parents did not think that a Protestant school was good enough.

But you tell me that your daughter's teacher is one of the loveliest creatures in the world; that she is, both by nature and by culture, a model of everything in mind and manners that you wish your daughter to become; that you are sure that your wish would be a law to her, and that she would never say a word to influence your child to any belief not in accordance with your own. I will not question the correctness of your impression in respect to her character; she may, I doubt not, be as amiable and attractive as you represent her, and she may never seem to exert any influence adverse to the religious system to which your daughter has been educated; but allow me to say that all this does not in my judgment lessen the danger. An indirect and insensible influence is often the most powerful; and I am inclined to think that the surest way of making a convert of a young lady to any false system, would be to place her in just such circumstances as I am supposing. Let her hear little or nothing said concerning it, but let her see it associated with the graceful amenities of life, while she constantly breathes an atmosphere formed under its influence. You may rest assured that your daughter must have the power of resistance in an uncommon degree, if she can withstand such an influence

as this; and even if she should not actually be converted to Romanism, the least you can expect is that it will make her tolerant of the difference between Romanists and Protestants, and will fill her mind with notions altogether unfavourable to her holding a fixed and consistent faith in the great truths of the Gospel.

I might ask whether something is not due to the relation you bear to the Church of which you are a member; and whether, inasmuch as you know that many of them are deeply wounded by your course in this respect, it is not your duty even to sacrifice your own predilections rather than continue an occasion of offence. But without dwelling upon this point, I cannot but remind you that what you are doing places you in at least a highly equivocal attitude, in respect to the great conflict that is now going on, preparatory to the Mediator's universal reign. If anything is rendered certain, either by the aspects of providence, or the word of prophecy, it is that the Romish church is the great anti-Christian power that is finally to be vanquished; though not till after it has been still longer drunk with the blood of the saints. I cannot see but that in the selection of a school for your daughter, you have, to say the least, placed yourself in a false position, as a Christian, looking and praying for the destruction of Satan's kingdom, and the universal prevalence

of truth and righteousness. You profess to join in prayers for this blessed consummation every Sabbath; and I have no reason to doubt that similar petitions often ascend from your closet; but I am constrained to think that, if you look at the case intelligently and candidly, you will detect a sad contradiction between what you ask God to do, and what you yourself are doing.

But notwithstanding all that I have said, you must not understand me as wishing to foster a spirit of hostility towards the Roman Catholics. So far from it, that I would treat them, and would advise all to treat them, with uniform kindness; and I would be as ready to acknowledge whatever is praiseworthy and of good report in their characters, as if I were in full sympathy with their religious views. I would bear in mind, and would have others bear in mind, that the system which they hold is that under which they were born, and to which they have been trained with most scrupulous fidelity; and it were unreasonable to expect that hereditary prejudices which have been the growth of many centuries, should yield to the power of truth without first holding a vigorous conflict with it. I would oppose every measure that tends to the abridgment of any of their just rights—much more anything that bears even the semblance of persecution towards them. But after all, I would never even seem to connive at

their errors, or do anything, either from courtesy or convenience, that should lead them or others to suppose that I regarded their errors as trivial. Above all, I would never give them the forming of my children's minds, thus exposing those who are most dear to me to evils greater than any human mind can estimate.

THE END.

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